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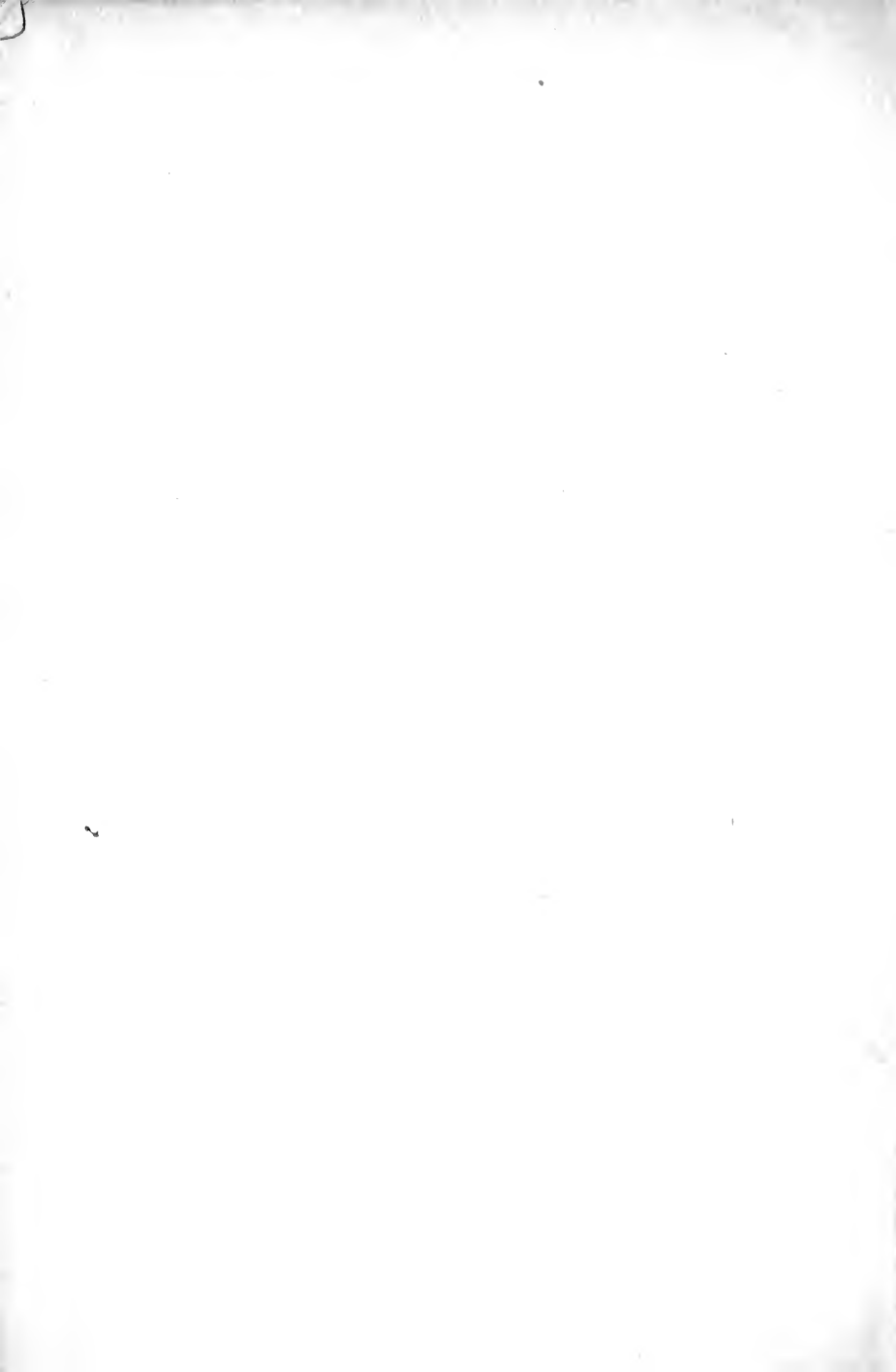
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NEW BOYS

AT CAMP MYSTERY



FREDERICK GORDON



Merry Christmas 1926

To Miss Chapman
from Buck Can

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"What's the matter?" cried the hunter.

FAIRVIEW BOYS AT CAMP MYSTERY

OR

THE OLD HERMIT AND HIS SECRET

BY

FREDERICK GORDON

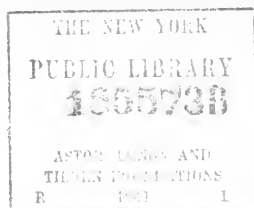
AUTHOR OF "FAIRVIEW BOYS AFLOAT AND ASHORE," "FAIRVIEW BOYS ON
EAGLE MOUNTAIN," "FAIRVIEW BOYS AND THEIR RIVALS," ETC.

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NEW YORK



BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FREDERICK GORDON
FAIRVIEW BOYS SERIES

Illustrated. Price, per volume,
75 cents, postpaid.

- FAIRVIEW BOYS AFLOAT AND ASHORE**
Or, The Young Crusoes of Pine Island
- FAIRVIEW BOYS ON EAGLE MOUNTAIN**
Or, Sammy Brown's Treasure Hunt
- FAIRVIEW BOYS AND THEIR RIVALS**
Or, Bob Bouncer's Schooldays
- FAIRVIEW BOYS AT CAMP MYSTERY**
Or, The Old Hermit and His Secret
- FAIRVIEW BOYS AT LIGHTHOUSE COVE**
Or, Carried Out to Sea

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Fairview Boys At Camp Mystery

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Made in U. S. A.

Fairview Boys at Camp Mystery

CHAPTER I

THE EARTHQUAKE

"THERE's Jed Burr!"

"Coming back to school; eh? Then he can't be suspended any more."

"No, he isn't. But I wish he was. There's sure to be a lot of trouble now, and I was thinking how much more fun we could have with him away."

Three boys stood talking together in the school yard, where many children were waiting for the final bell to ring to call them to their studies. The three boys were looking at a larger lad, who was walking slowly along the gravel path.

"He looks to be the same bully as ever," said Bob Bouncer, one of the three boys.

"I guess he is, too," added Frank Haven. "Being suspended can't have changed him much."

"Well, if he tries any of his mean tricks on me," spoke Sammy Brown, "I know what I'll do!"

"What?" asked Frank, as he turned about to face the larger lad, so as to be ready, in case of any sudden attack, of the kind for which Jed Burr had a reputation. "What'll you do, Sammy?"

"I'll have him arrested! I'm not going to stand for any more of his games!"

"I'm with you!" agreed Bob. "But maybe we could play a trick on him first. He's played so many mean ones on us."

"Now don't start anything," advised Frank, who was more quiet than either of his two chums. "If we begin, the blame will be on us. We'll let Jed alone if he lets us."

"He doesn't seem to be going to do anything," added Sammy. "Maybe he's going to behave better this term."

"I hope so," returned Frank. "Well, let's go in. Doesn't our room look dandy, since they fixed it up after the fire?"

"I should say so!" cried Sammy. "And Miss Williams brought a fine lot of pictures for the walls. It's more like the parlor at home than a classroom."

"Yes, and Miss Williams isn't like some teachers, either," went on Frank. "She's as kind as can be."

The three boys strolled toward the schoolhouse, which had opened for the Fall term after some delay, caused by a fire. Now the building, in some parts, was altogether new, and all the rooms had been redecorated and painted. The structure had also been made larger.

"Well, I'm glad, in some ways, that school's begun again," said Sammy. "Though vacation was lots of fun."

"Yes, we can have some good times in school," agreed Frank.

"And there's that clubroom your father fixed up in the barn for us," put in Sammy. "That sure was good of him, Frank. We can have fun there, if we can't at school. And I'm going to do a lot of training in our club gymnasium, too, this winter."

"Huh! You train!" laughed Frank. "First we know you'll be off to the mountains, looking for more buried treasure."

"Aw, you're always casting that up!" grumbled Sammy.



"Still, you must give Bob credit for finding your father's jewelry that the tramp hid down in the schoolhouse well."

"That's right," agreed Frank. "And you found miser Dolby's pocketbook. Oh, say, look! There goes Jed into the principal's office! I guess something must be going to happen."

"I know all about it!" exclaimed a voice back of the three boys. They turned quickly, to see Nellie Somers.

"Tell us about it!" begged Sammy. He and his chums so much wanted to know the story of the suspended boy coming back, that they did not mind asking a girl about it.

"Jed has promised to be a better boy," said Nellie, glad that she had a chance to give some information. "The school board considered his case, after he took the spelling list out of Miss William's desk, and said he couldn't come back until he promised to be good. At first Jed wouldn't, but he finally did, and he has to apologize to the whole school this morning. Then he can be in his class again."

"Oh ho!" cried Sammy. "So that's what makes Jed so quiet!"

"No wonder he didn't try any tricks," added Frank.

"He sure will feel mean to have to get up before the whole school," added Bob Bouncer. "Come on in. It's almost time for the last bell."

"Good-bye!" cried Nellie, as she ran on to join her girl friends.

It was the first day of the new term, and there was more or less confusion. And since it was the first day, no one wanted to be late. Also the talk of Jed's apology had spread, and everyone wanted to see what would happen.

Into the school trooped the boys and girls, laughing and talking. Many looked about to see the changes made since the fire. As Sammy, Frank and Bob started up a short flight

of steps to their room, they were startled to hear a banging noise above them. They looked up, and saw Johnnie Jones, one of the fattest little chaps in the school, start to roll down. He had stumbled at the top step, and had fallen head over heels.

"Look out!" cried Bob.

"Hold fast!" advised Sammy.

"Catch him!" called Frank, and this was the best advice of all. "Get together," went on Frank to his chums, "and we'll hold him when he gets here."

They were now about half-way up the flight of steps, and, forming themselves into a solid body, as though about to stop a rush in a football game, they braced themselves to catch fat Johnnie.

With a bump and a bounce he landed against them, and in another moment Frank had set the little fellow on his feet again.

"There you are, Johnnie!" said Frank, while Sammy and Bob brushed the dust from his clothes. "You aren't hurt; are you?"

Johnnie gasped once or twice, opened his mouth as though to howl, and then, thinking better of it, closed his lips again.

"No, I'm not hurt!" he said bravely.

"He's too fat to get hurt!" laughed Bob. "You're like a rubber ball; aren't you, Johnnie?"

"I—I guess so," answered the little fellow, "but I don't want to bounce down stairs again!"

The three chums laughed at him as he started up the stairs once more, and they kept close behind him, but he did not fall again.

Into their classroom went Bob, Sammy and Frank. Other boys and girls were already there, and more came in. Miss

Williams was there to meet them with a smile. She was a very pretty school-teacher, and her pupils loved her.

Soon the final bell rang, and then the children from the different rooms marched into the one, big main hall, or auditorium, where the morning exercises were held. There were many new pupils present this first day of the term.

There was singing, the reading of the Bible, and prayers, and then Mr. Tetlow, the principal of the school, greeted those present. He spoke of the fire, and what had happened at it, and mentioned the delay in opening the school. He welcomed all who had now come, and said he hoped they would all study hard to make up for lost time.

"And now," went on the principal, "I have something not so pleasant to say. But it has to be done, and it may be for the good of all of us. One of our pupils was suspended last term for doing something wrong. We all do wrong sometimes, but if we are sorry for it, and try not to do it again, we should be forgiven.

"And so I hope when you hear Jed Burr say that he is sorry, you will all forgive him, and be friends with him again. Now Jed, let's get it over with," and he smiled at the former bully, who sat in a front seat. The principal wanted to make it as easy as he could for the lad.

Jed was very red in the face as he shuffled up to the platform. He hung down his head, and no one could doubt but that his punishment was hard. He stood for a moment before all the school, getting very red in the face.

"Well," said Mr. Tetlow, kindly, "go on, Jed. Just a few words, to tell us you are sorry."

"I—I—er—I done wrong," stammered poor Jed, "and I'm sorry for it!"

The principal stepped up beside him.

"That is enough," he said. "You did very well, Jed. Now

we will let bygones be bygones. You may all go to your classes."

Sammy, Bob and Frank, with the others, marched out. The little scene in which Jed, their former enemy, had taken part, had made them do some hard thinking. They were glad they had not been called on to stand up and apologize to the whole school.

Soon lessons were under way once more. Miss Williams gave a little talk to the pupils in her room, explaining the new work that was to be taken up that Fall and Winter.

"It will be harder than that which you had before the fire," she said, "but you know we have to go ahead in this world. It will not do to stand still. I will help you all I can."

"You will notice that I have hung some pictures on the walls. They are to help you in your lessons, for it is sometimes easy to understand a thing when we see a picture of it. I have other pictures to bring when we need them."

Sammy Brown suddenly thought of something. He raised his hand to show that he wished to speak.

"What is it?" asked Miss Williams.

"We've got some pictures in our clubroom," said Sammy. "I could bring them. There's a football game picture, and a lot of baseball players, and a man hunting, and——"

Sammy saw a smile on Miss William's face, and paused.

"That's very nice of you, Sammy," she said, kindly, "and if we need that sort of pictures you may bring them. But I'm afraid our lessons won't be about baseball or football. You'll get enough of those games out of school."

"Now we will begin on the geography lesson. I want you to look at this picture over here. It shows——"

But Miss Williams did not say what the picture showed, for at that moment there was a low, deep rumbling that seemed to go all through the school. The building shook and

trembled. Then the rumble grew to a roaring sound, and the building vibrated still more. The windows rattled as if the glass would break.

Several girls screamed. The boys leaped from their desks.

"It's another fire!" yelled Sammy.

"It's an explosion!" shouted Bob.

"No! It's an earthquake!" exclaimed Frank. "Come on, everybody! Get out before the school falls on us!" and he made a rush for the door.

"Stop!" commanded Miss Williams sharply. "Boys, you are forgetting yourselves. Let the girls go first!"

And, while the rumbling continued, and the building still shook, the boys held back, while the girls rushed from the room.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST SNOW

THE whole school was in excitement. From all the rooms the boys and girls were rushing out, not stopping for their hats or coats. Frightened teachers, and the excited principal, were trying to quiet them. For everyone felt sure the school building was going to fall, and all wanted to get out as quickly as possible.

"Now, boys, you may go!" said Miss Williams, when the girls were out of her room.

Some of the boys started, but Frank Haven, taking his place at the door, cried:

"No, Miss Williams, you go first!"

She gave him a glance that showed how much she appreciated his thoughtfulness for her, but she said quietly, though her lips trembled:

"No, Frank. I am like the captain of a ship. I will stay until the last. But, oh, do hurry out!"

Hearing this two other boys made a rush.

"That won't do!" cried Bob sharply. "You'll all get in a jam on the stairs."

"That's right!" exclaimed Sammy. "Form in line, as we always do at fire drill!"

"Good!" cried Miss Williams. "Ready! In line! March!"

Her sharp command had a good effect, and the boys marched

out in order. Sammy and his two chums came fast, and Miss Williams followed them. The rumbling and shaking of the building still continued, and now dense white clouds could be seen coming from the basement.

"She's on fire again!" cried Sammy, as he and his chums reached the yard safely.

"And she'll burn up!" added Bob.

The school yard was filled with excited children, the teachers urging them to get as far away from the building as they could.

"Is everyone out?" asked the principal. "Teachers, look at your different classes and see!"

This was done quickly.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Miss Watson, teacher of the kindergarten. "Oh dear!"

"What is it?" someone asked.

"Johnnie Jones—he isn't here!"

At that instant, through a cloud of smoke in front of the window of the kindergarten room a face could be seen. It was that of Johnnie Jones.

"He's in there!" gasped his teacher.

"I'll get him!" shouted the principal. "Get the children farther off!"

"Now, let me get him—please?" cried another voice, and Jed Burr, the bully, who had apologized that morning, sprang forward and went back again into the building which it was feared would fall at any moment.

"I can't let him do that!" murmured the principal. "I must go after both of them."

But before he could do this Jed came out again, carrying fat little Johnnie Jones in his arms.

"I got him all right!" shouted the former bully.

"You're a brave boy!" cried Mr. Tetlow.

Just then the janitor of the school came up out of the basement.

"It's all right!" he cried, through a white cloud of steam. "I have fixed it! I'll tell you all how it happened."

"Is the earthquake over?" asked Sammy.

"It wasn't an earthquake," said Mr. Hobb, the janitor. "Come here, and I'll tell you about it."

And while the frightened teachers and pupils are gathering back in their rooms, the danger being over, I will take a few moments to tell my new readers something about the boys and others who are to have parts in this story, and also something about the previous books in this series.

To begin with, I think you already know my three heroes—Sammy Brown, Bob Bouncer and Frank Haven. Though I have named him last in this case, Frank was generally the leader in anything he and his two chums did. Bob and Sammy thought there was no one in the world like Frank.

Sammy was rather more quiet, and his mother said more thoughtful, but if this was so, it was only because Sammy was always thinking up something to do. He was quite a reader, and liked stories of mystery, and buried treasure. He was always sure that some day he would find a hidden store of gold, or make some big discovery.

Bob Bouncer was a different sort of lad. He was full of fun, not to say mischief, and when he was around one had better look out that he did not find a funny note pinned to his coat-tail or else watch out that he did not discover a stone dropped into his pocket. But, though Bob played many jokes, they were not mean or cruel ones.

The three boys lived in the town of Fairview, on the shore of Rainbow Lake, a large body of water, in the centre of which was an extensive island.

The first book of this series was called "The Fairview

Boys Afloat and Ashore; Or, The Young Crusoes of Pine Island." In that I had the pleasure of telling how the three chums went out on the lake in the *Puff*, a sailboat owned by George Haven, Frank's brother. They did not know much about boats, and the result was that the *Puff* was wrecked near Pine Island. The boys managed to get on this body of land, and there they lived, until rescued, in real Robinson Crusoe style.

In the second book, called "The Fairview Boys on Eagle Mountain; Or, Sammy Brown's Treasure Hunt," I related how the lads set off on a tour of discovery. Sammy Brown had come across some curious papers in his home attic, and was sure they told of hidden treasure. So the party set off for Eagle Mountain, and what they did there, and how the treasure hunt ended, you may read of in the book.

"The Fairview Boys and Their Rivals; Or, Bob Bouncer's Schooldays," is the name of the third volume. In that you can find out all about the many things Bob and his chums did; how they got the better of a mad bull, how they had fun in the woods, and how it was that Jed Burr came to be expelled. Then came the robbery of Mr. Haven's jewelry store, the fire in the school, and the finding of the jewelry down in the well, where the thief had thrown it.

And the fire, as I have related, was the cause of the school not being opened on the regular day in the term. Which brings us down to the present time.

"Was there a fire?" asked Mr. Tetlow, the principal.

"No, not exactly a fire," answered the janitor, "though the trouble was caused by a fire."

"And there wasn't any earthquake?" asked Sammy. He was rather disappointed, to tell the truth, that there had been nothing as big and sensational as an earthquake.

"Nary an earthquake," went on Mr. Hobb, who was rather pale. "Indeed everyone had been greatly alarmed.

"But the building shook!" declared Nellie Somers.

"It certainly did," agreed Miss Williams. "I thought surely it was going to fall down."

"And I thought Jed was going to fall down with me," spoke up Johnnie Jones. "He shook me up and down."

"I couldn't help it," said Jed, with blushing face. "You're so—so fat."

"I guess I am," sighed little Johnnie.

"Well, Jed, it was one of the bravest acts I have ever seen," declared the principal, and Jed blushed with pleasure. It seemed that he wanted to make up for his mean tricks in the past by showing that he could be a hero when he desired.

"Now I'll tell you how it was," went on the janitor.

"Yes, do," urged Mr. Tetlow. "We don't want it to happen again."

By this time the excitement had quieted down. There was no more smoke, and there was no smell of fire.

"I had started up the new heating boiler to try it," explained the janitor. "We didn't exactly need steam on to-day, though it is a bit cold, and it looks like snow. But I thought I'd try the new steam plant, so I built a fire in the boiler.

"I left it going and went off to do some work in another part of the school, and I guess I forgot about the steam. Anyhow, all at once I heard the roar and the rumble, and I felt the building shake. I knew right away what had happened, and I ran down cellar. I didn't even stop to explain to anyone."

"Well, what did happen?" asked the principal.

"Why, the safety valve got stuck, and when the pressure got too heavy it wouldn't let the steam escape. So the pipes, all through the school, were filled and the pressure was so

strong that they commenced to shake and tremble. That made the building vibrate, and the boiler began to rumble and roar, too.

"I was afraid it might blow up, so down I rushed and opened the safety valve that was stuck shut. That let out the steam, and the pressure in the pipes went down. And that's all."

"It was enough," said Miss Williams. "So that white cloud was steam, and not smoke from a fire?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the janitor, "it was only steam."

"Is the safety valve all right now?" asked Mr. Tetlow.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" exclaimed the janitor. "I fixed it. I should have looked at it first, but it slipped my mind. I'm sorry."

"Well, it's all right, as long as no one is hurt," said the principal. "And now, as we have had so much excitement, I hardly believe that you children could do well with your lessons this morning. It is eleven o'clock now, so I will dismiss you all until this afternoon. Come back when you have had your dinners."

There were cries of delight at this, and the boys and girls hurried back into their classrooms, after their hats and coats, for the weather seemed to be getting colder.

Sammy and his two chums passed close to Jed Burr as they went in. Then Sammy did a kind act.

"Will you shake hands, Jed?" he asked of the former bully. "That was a fine thing you did."

Jed blushed.

"Aw, that was nothin'," he said. "There wasn't any danger."

"But you didn't know that," returned Frank. "I'd like to shake hands with you, too."

"So would I," added Bob Bouncer. "I guess we'll all be friends now, after this."

"I've turned over a new leaf," said Jed, when they had shaken hands with him. "I'm not going to bother you fellows any more."

"That's good," spoke Sammy, for Jed had been a sore trial to them, and to many other small lads of Fairview.

"And we'd be glad to have you around to our clubhouse whenever you want to come," added Frank, kindly.

"Thanks," said Jed, gratefully.

After Bob Bouncer had discovered Mr. Haven's jewelry hidden in the well, following the schoolhouse fire, the merchant had offered Bob a reward of a hundred dollars. But Bob's father would not let him take it, so Mr. Haven used the money in fitting up, in his barn, a fine clubroom and gymnasium for Bob and his chums.

Talking over the accident to the steam boiler, and making merry that they had had such a short morning session, the boys and girls hurried along on their way home. Sammy and his chums walked together, and, every now and then, Sammy would look up at the sky.

"What are you planning now?" asked Bob, giving Sammy a sly punch in the ribs. "Studying how to make an airship?" and he winked at Frank.

"Aw, let me alone," begged Sammy. "Can't I look at the weather if I want to?"

"Sure," agreed Bob. "But what makes you so serious about it?"

"I'm thinking it's going to snow," answered Sammy, "and I'm going to get out my sled, when I go home, to be ready for it. I've got to get the rust off the runners."

"Snow!" cried Frank. "It won't snow to-day."

But it did. Before school was out that afternoon the white

flakes began coming lazily down, and the children, looking from the windows, felt merry at the prospect of a storm. Snow is so different from rain. Almost everyone is happy and jolly when it snows, but miserable when it rains.

"Say, it's going to be a good storm all right!" cried Sammy, as he and his chums came out of school when lessons were over for the day. "It's three inches deep now, and falling fast."

"Yes, we'll have to get out our snow-shoes if it keeps on," laughed Bob, as he slyly dropped some snow down Frank's neck.

"Ouch!" cried Frank, squirming about as he felt the coldness down his spine. "I'll wash your face for that, Bob Bouncer!"

He raced down the street after his fun-loving chum, but before he reached him he saw something that made him stop. This was the sight of an elderly lady walking carefully along, just ahead of him, through the snow. As Frank came up behind her he saw her fall heavily, and lay quite still in a heap on the sidewalk.

"Here you go, fellows!" cried Frank, to Bob and Sammy. "We've got to help her—come here!"

CHAPTER III

SAMMY HAS AN IDEA

"MAYBE she's dead!" gasped Sammy Brown, as he reached the side of Frank, and looked down on the motionless old lady.

"There you go!" cried Frank, half angrily, "always thinking something like that. Why should she be dead?"

"She fell heavily enough," said Bob. "The snow's awful slippery. Maybe her leg's broken."

"That's more like it," said Frank. "Now we've got to take her into one of these houses. Can we carry her?"

"I guess we'll have to," said Bob. "There doesn't seem to be anyone else around just now. Can we lift her?"

At that moment the elderly lady who had fallen tried to get up. Her eyes, that had been closed, were opened, and she looked very pale.

"Are you hurt?" asked Frank, anxiously. "We'll help you get up, and carry you into one of these houses."

He gazed up and down the street as he spoke. There were no other persons in sight, and the accident had happened at a place where there were only a few houses. Had there been stores nearby someone might have come out at once to help the old lady.

"I don't believe I am badly hurt," she said, with a smile. "I thought at first my leg was broken, but I'm sure, now, it is not, though it may be sprained. I slipped and struck my head when I went down. I must have been unconscious for a few seconds."



"Are you hurt?" asked Frank.



"You were," said Bob, who had once seen his mother faint. "Now, if you'll let us, we can carry you to the nearest house, and get a doctor."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you nice boys," spoke the elderly lady, "but I do not believe you can carry me. I am pretty heavy."

"We're strong," declared Sammy. "We play football!" he added, proudly.

"Well, I think I can walk," the lady went on, "though I may have to lean on your shoulders. I should not have come out without my rubbers to-day, but I did not think it was going to snow. I guess Winter has set in now, and I rather dread it."

The boys thought this strange. To them Winter was one of their jolly seasons, when they had much fun. They did not stop to think that the poor and the old do not like the hard cold of Winter.

"If you will let me take hold of your hands," went on the elderly lady, "I think I can get to my feet. Then you may be able to help me to one of those houses."

She held up her hands as she spoke. Sammy took one and Frank the other, while Bob lifted her at the shoulders.

"Now!" she exclaimed, in a stronger voice than she had used before, "all together, and I'll be up!"

The boys pulled and pushed, and slowly the old lady was gotten to her feet. She swayed unsteadily for a moment, and leaned heavily on Frank.

Just then, a window in the nearest house was opened, and a woman, leaning out, called:

"Bring her right over here, boys. I'll look after her. I'll come and help you. Are you much hurt, Mrs. Blake? I just happened to see you."

"No, thank you, I'm not much hurt. I think I'm all right,

except perhaps for a strain, or some bruises," was the answer. "I have good helpers, you see. Don't come out in the storm. They can get me to your house."

"Are you Mrs. Blake?" asked Sammy, quickly.

"That is my name," was her answer, with a smile.

"I guess my mother knows you," went on Sammy. "Her name is Brown."

"Oh, are you Mrs. Brown's boy?" exclaimed Mrs. Blake. "I thought I knew your face. Well, I'm real glad to see you. And are these your brothers?"

"No'm, they're my chums," answered Sammy. "Do you feel all right now?"

"Yes, only a trifle dizzy. I'll be better when I rest a bit in Mrs. Handee's house. Now let me see if I can walk."

She found that she could, by going slowly. The shock of her fall was passing off, and by leaning on the shoulders of Bob and Frank, while Sammy carried her bag and umbrella for her, she made her way to the house where the woman waited with the door open. Mrs. Handee came down the front steps to help Mrs. Blake up, and soon the elderly lady was sitting comfortably in an easy chair before the fire.

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Blake, leaning back comfortably. "This has been quite an experience for me," and she looked at the three boys, who did not know exactly what to do, now that they had come in. "I never fell before—not since I was a girl, and I guess I've forgotten how to do it."

"You were lucky not to have broken some bones," spoke Mrs. Handee. "Are you sure you don't want the doctor?"

"We'll go for one!" offered Sammy, eagerly.

"Oh, no, indeed, I don't want one," declared Mrs. Blake, with a laugh. "I'll be all right soon, and able to go home. My daughter will be worried about me. My, how it snows!"

and she looked out of the window where could be seen a perfect cloud of white flakes coming down.

"Yes, I think we're going have a regular old-fashioned Winter," said Mrs. Handee. "I dread it, too. Now I'm going to make you a nice hot cup of tea. Will you boys have something to eat?" she asked.

Sammy and his chums looked at one another and their faces got rather red.

"If—if you please," said Sammy, "I'm not allowed to have strong tea."

"Me either!" added Frank and Bob.

"Bless your hearts! I didn't mean tea!" laughed Mrs. Handee. "It is not good for growing boys, unless it's very, very weak, and then it isn't tea. I meant to give you some bread and jam. Do you think you could eat it?"

"Could we?" murmured Sammy.

"Just try us, Mrs. Handee!" exclaimed Frank, and, with another laugh, the lady of the house went out to the kitchen.

"Well, I'm sure I can't thank you boys enough for what you did for me," said Mrs. Blake, after a pause.

"It wasn't anything," replied Bob.

"Oh, yes, it was, too!" she insisted. "I thank you very much, and I want to tell your mothers what nice boys you are. Lots of young folks now-a-days don't think, or care, anything about the old folks. Seems to me, now, that I've often seen you three boys around Fairview together; haven't I?" and she looked at them closely.

"Yes'm, we're generally together," replied Sammy.

"Do you go camping together?" asked Mrs. Blake.

"Oh, yes, often," spoke Frank.

"And once we were all wrecked together on Pine Island," added Bob.

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Mrs. Blake. "On Pine

Island? Why I have a brother there. Peter Jessup is his name. He's quite a hunter, too. He lives at the far end, near Woodport. Have you ever been there?"

"No, we were down at the other end," said Frank.

"Then perhaps you did not meet my brother?"

"No, not that we know of," answered Sammy.

"I'm sure he'd be glad to see you," proceeded Mrs. Blake.

"He is fond of boys. When he was young he was just like you, always going off on hunting or fishing trips. If ever you go to Pine Island again I wish you'd call on him. I'll write him a letter, explaining how kind you have been to me, and I'm sure he'd be glad to see you at his hunting cabin."

"Has he a hunting cabin?" asked Bob, his eyes shining in delight.

"Indeed he has, with lots of skins, and deer horns and the like of that in it," said Mrs. Blake. "Of course he did not get them all around here, for game is rather scarce. But he lives the life of a hunter still, sleeps in a 'bunk' as he calls it, and all that. He even cooks over a campfire in the summer."

"Oh, I wish we could go there!" sighed Bob.

"I'm sure you'll be welcome," spoke Mrs. Blake. And then Mrs. Handee came in with the tea for her elderly guest, and the bread and jam for the boys, and that they enjoyed it I am sure I need not say.

"Well, I think I will be able to go along now," said Mrs. Blake, after a pause. "That tea made me feel much better."

"Are you sure you can go?" asked Mrs. Handee. "It's quite a step to your daughter's house."

"Oh, I can do it," was the answer. "My leg is much better, and I only have a slight headache. I thank you very much. As for you boys, don't forget to come and see me, and I'll tell you more about my brother Peter. I'll be sure to write to him and tell him you're going to visit him."

"We'll go if we can," said Frank.

Sammy Brown seemed to be thinking deeply on some subject.

The boys said good-bye and went out into the storm. The snow was still coming down, and they wanted to play in it—to make balls to toss at one another, to roll in it, to jump over and into the drifts, to roll big balls as the foundation for a snow house.

There was nothing more they could do for Mrs. Blake, she said, and she would soon start for home herself. So Sammy, Bob and Frank hurried away, promising to call on the lady to whose aid they had come.

"Are you really going?" asked Frank of his chums, as they walked on through the snow. "I mean to her house?"

"Of course we are!" cried Sammy. "I want to meet her brother the hunter; don't you?"

"I guess it would be nice," agreed Frank.

"Nice!" cried Sammy. "Say, I guess you don't know what might happen if we went to see him; do you?"

"You mean we might shoot a bear or a deer?" laughed Frank.

"No, I don't mean anything like that, for now there aren't any such things on Pine Island. But you know we never have been up at the far end of the island, and we might find——"

"Oh, I know what he's going to say!" cried Frank, as he threw a snowball at a boy going down the street. "You're thinking we can find some treasure there; eh, Sammy?"

"Well, we might!" insisted Sammy, not minding the laughs of his chums. "That part of the island is lonely enough for treasure. But I had another idea."

"Say, you're full of 'em to-day!" remarked Bob.

"Let's hear it," suggested Frank.

"Well, you know there's supposed to be a queer old hermit up at the far end of the island," went on Sammy.

"A hermit?" cried Frank.

"Yes, a strange old hermit, with a long white beard, and I've heard it said that he has some secret he's trying to hide. If we go there we might find out the secret. Now what do you think of that for an idea?" demanded Sammy, eagerly.

CHAPTER IV

A QUEER SIGHT

SAMMY'S two chums looked strangely at him. He returned their gaze steadily.

"Well," he said, defiantly, "it's true! What makes you look at me that way?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Frank. "He's the same old Sammy, isn't he, Bob?"

"That's what he is! Always thinking he's going to find a treasure, and if he can't do that he trots out an old hermit. Go on, Sammy, can't you scare up a ghost while you're at it? The ghost of Pine Island! Go ahead, make up something about that."

Sammy Brown turned squarely about, and walked away from his chums without saying a word.

For a moment Frank and Bob looked after him, and then they looked at one another.

"There he goes," exclaimed Frank.

"And I guess he's mad, too," added Bob.

"But I didn't mean anything."

"Neither did I!"

"Let's call him back."

"Let's go after him!"

Thus Bob and Frank spoke, one after the other. Then Bob cried:

"I say, Sammy! Come on back! Wait a minute. We didn't mean anything."

But Sammy kept on his way, never turning his head to look back. On he plodded through the snow that was still falling.

"He's real mad this time," said Bob.

"Yes, I guess we'll have to apologize, same as Jed Burr did," agreed Frank. "Come on!"

Together they raced after Sammy, and, catching up to him, they grasped him by either arm. They spoke quickly and eagerly by turns.

"We didn't mean anything."

"We were only fooling."

"Maybe there is a hermit on Pine Island after all."

"We—we apologize!" burst out Frank.

He said it in such a comical manner that Sammy, hurt as his feelings had been, could not stand out against his chums any longer. A smile came over his face, and then Bob and Frank laughed too.

"All right, Sammy," declared Frank. "We believe you. Tell us about the hermit. Maybe we can go up there and see him."

"And about the ghost, too," added Bob.

"There isn't any ghost that I know of," cried Sammy, quickly, "and I didn't mention any."

"Bob means the hermit," said Frank quickly, winking at his chum to show that he must not speak of that subject again. "Tell us about the hermit, Sammy."

"Well, I'll tell you all I heard," went on the lad who so loved to dig after mysteries. "It was Benny Lane, the cripple boy, who told me. I was walking along with him one day, about a week ago, and we saw old Silas Dolby, the miser, just ahead of us. I just happened to say that Mr. Dolby lived like a hermit, and Benny said that it was so, for his uncle had once seen a hermit."

"And of course that set you going right off," spoke Bob.

"Yes, it did," answered Sammy. "I asked Benny where his uncle had seen the hermit, and Ben said it was on Pine Island. That was the first I ever heard of one of those men being there, so I asked all I could about it.

"Benny didn't know much, but he said his uncle had been out fishing one day, and stopped off at Pine Island to eat his lunch. He was almost through, when an old man, all stooped over, and with a long white beard, came out of the bushes, shook a stick at Benny's uncle and told him to get off that part of the island, as he owned it."

"Did he go?" asked Frank.

"Yes," went on Sammy, "for the hermit acted dangerous. Ben's uncle thought maybe he might be an escaped lunatic. So he got into his boat, the hermit watching him all the while, and rowed away."

"And what became of the hermit?" asked Frank, always eager for details.

"He disappeared into the bushes again," said Sammy. "I didn't tell you fellows anything about this, for I knew you'd laugh. Then, when Mrs. Blake just now told us about her brother living on Pine Island, and when she said we might go to see him, I thought I'd tell you about the hermit. But you didn't believe me."

"Oh, but we do now!" said Frank, quickly.

"And is he hunting after a buried treasure?" asked Bob. He began to think there might be more, after all, to Sammy's story than he had at first thought.

"I don't know, for sure, anything about a treasure there," said Sammy, remembering how he had once started on a treasure hunt, which had ended in the finding of only a pocket-book with memorandum papers in it. And this belonged to Miser Dolby. But there was something else of value in the wallet, so, after all, Sammy's hunt amounted to something.

"Well, we might go up to the island, and see the wild hermit, anyhow," suggested Frank. "That would give us something to do when we get a day or so of vacation."

"The only trouble is that the lake will soon be frozen over," put in Bob.

"We could skate over," suggested Sammy.

"That's right, we could!" cried Frank. "We'll do it!"

"What do you s'pose the hermit lives on the island for?" asked Bob. "And why didn't we see him when we were wrecked there?"

"I don't know," replied Sammy. "Maybe he likes to be lonesome, or else maybe no one wants him to live near them. He may be sort of wild."

"I should think he was, if he drove Benny's uncle away," came from Frank. "We'll have to be careful if we meet him."

"That's right," agreed Sammy Brown.

The boys kept on toward their homes, meeting with many of their friends on the way. There were several snowballs thrown, all in good fun, and some of the boys proposed to make a snow fort, and have a regular snowball fight.

The next day, after school, the fort was built in a vacant lot. Then the boys divided into sides, one party getting inside the fort, and the other, outside, trying to capture it.

The three chums decided it would be more fun to storm the fort, so they joined the outside forces. The battle lasted for some time, and many snowballs were thrown back and forth.

"Come on, now! Charge on the enemy!" cried Frank, when he thought he saw a good chance to take the fort.

He led the charge, and with such good effect that the fort was captured, and he and his chums left in possession. Then



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the battle turned about, and the snowball fight began all over again.

Several days of winter fun passed. The boys and girls went coasting before and after school, made snow-men and rolled large snowballs. The weather was pleasant, and just warm enough so that the snow would pack well.

One day Mrs. Blake called on Mrs. Brown, to thank her for the way in which Sammy and his chums had helped her.

"Your son and his chums are very bright and good boys," said Mrs. Blake, who had gotten over her fall in the snow. "I have written to my brother, Peter Jessup, about them, and he says anytime they want to visit his end of Pine Island he'll be glad to look after them."

"That is very kind of him," said Mrs. Brown, "but Sammy and his two friends go off now on more strange trips than I think is good for them."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Mrs. Blake. "Boys will be boys! Let 'em roam, I say, as long as you know where they are, and that they are safe."

"Well, I guess if they get the chance they'll go," laughed Mrs. Brown. "They generally get what they're after. I'll tell them of your kindness."

When Sammy and his chums heard of what Mrs. Blake had said, and of the invitation of Mr. Jessup, the hunter, they grew excited at once, and wanted to start for Pine Island the next day.

But there was school to be thought of, and they, as well as the other pupils, had missed considerable on account of the delay caused by the fire.

"Besides, it's Winter now—not Summer," said Mrs. Brown. "It would not do to go to the island in Winter."

"Oh, yes, it would," cried Sammy. "We could dress warm."

"Besides," said Frank, "Mr. Jessup had a warm cabin."

"Well, you'd better wait," suggested Sammy's mother, and they had to do so.

But, about a week after this, there came a cold spell of weather and the lake was frozen over. When Frank awoke one morning he looked out of his window, and saw a sheet of ice on Rainbow.

"Oh, fine!" he cried. "Now for some skating!"

He took his skates to school with him that morning, as did Sammy and Bob, and during the noon recess the chums, and several of their friends, tried the ice. It was smooth, and thick enough to be safe.

"Let's skate over to Pine Island after school is out!" proposed Sammy.

"I'm with you!" cried Bob.

"And I'll go too," added Frank. "Maybe we'll see the hermit."

They said nothing to their companions about their plans, but when school was dismissed that afternoon they put on their skates and started across the frozen lake. They felt sure they could reach the island and get back home before dark, and each had received permission to go skating after school, though the island was not mentioned.

It was glorious fun on the ice. For some time the three chums found themselves in the midst of their skating companions, but they soon left them behind, and, a little later, were nearing Pine Island.

"Make for the upper end," advised Sammy. "That's where the hermit will be, if he's anywhere."

But though they had had good luck up to this time, bad luck now set in. First the skate of one of the boys would become loose, and he would have to stop and tighten it. Then the same thing would happen to another. So they were

delayed, and it was almost dusk when they came opposite the far end of the island. This was a place they had seldom, if ever, visited.

"Well, here we are at last," said Sammy. "I'm going to take off my skates and go ashore a while. My feet ache."

"We really ought to go back," said Frank, slowly. "It's getting dark, and if we're as long going home as we were coming it will be after six when we get in. The folks will worry."

"Oh, well, we won't stay but a minute—just to rest," said Bob. "I'm all out of wind."

"Well, all right," agreed Frank.

So they took off their skates and walked on the island. It was covered with snow, and curiously still and silent.

"I wonder where Mr. Jessup has his cabin?" spoke Sammy.

"Probably well inland," said Frank.

"Hark!" cautioned Bob.

There sounded a rustling in the bushes just ahead of the boys, near a clump of trees. Something moved.

"Maybe it's a bear!" exclaimed Sammy.

"Huh! Like the one you thought you saw before, only it was a dog!" laughed Bob.

"Forget it!" grunted Sammy. He did not like to be reminded of that.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Frank. With trembling finger he pointed straight ahead. It seemed as if a snowbank was moving. And then the boys saw a queer sight.

A shaggy head of white hair, and a long white beard rose up almost in front of them. The hair and beard framed a scowling face, that glared directly at the three boys.

"Quick! Run!" cried Sammy. "It's the wild hermit of Pine Island!"

CHAPTER V

WINTER FUN

FOR a moment, in spite of Sammy's warning, neither of his chums was able to move. Nor, for that matter, was Sammy either. As snakes are said to charm birds by looking at them steadily, so the sight of the old hermit, if such he was, seemed to charm the three boys into standing still there in the snow on the shore of Pine Island.

It was rather a scary scene, with dusk falling, amid a silence that was more startling than noise would have been. The old man rose up from the snow-covered bushes, seeming to tower more than six feet in height. He looked steadily at the boys.

Then Sammy found his voice again, and yelled:

"Come on, fellows, run!"

"That's right! I'm with you!" added Frank.

And by this time Bob Bouncer had gotten over his first fright, so he, too, added his voice to those of his chums.

"Hit him!" he cried. "Throw a snowball at him!"

"Don't you dare do it!" came from Sammy. "That'll make him awful mad! Run for all you're worth!"

This seemed the best advice, for really the old man, in spite of his long white hair and beard, that made him look something like the pictures of Santa Claus, had not a kindly-appearing face. He scowled, as though very angry at the boys.

As yet he had not said a word, only, as he rose to his full height, he made a move as if to come from behind the bushes, back of which he seemed to have been hiding.

"Here he comes!" yelled Sammy. "Come on, fellows!"

They needed no other warning. The three boys took to their heels, and crashed over the snow and bramble-covered ground to the edge of the frozen lake.

"You'd better get away from here!" yelled the strange old man after them. "If I catch you around here again, I'll——"

But the boys did not stop to hear what he would do to them. They did not even stop to fasten on their skates, but ran over the ice, slipping and sliding.

"Is—is he coming?" gasped Bob.

"I don't know. Look back and see for yourself," said Sammy.

Bob did so, but as one cannot very well run over slippery ice and look backward at the same time, what happened to Bob can be easily imagined.

Down he went in a heap, rolling over and over, and sliding along as well.

"Hey, fellows!" he cried. "Don't leave me. Help! He'll get me sure! Stay with me!"

His appeal touched the hearts of his chums.

"We can't leave him like that!" said Frank.

"No," panted Bob. "We'll have to stay with him."

They slid along, unable at first to stop on the slippery ice, and then they slowly came to a halt. Turning, they went back to pick up Bob, but he had already scrambled to his feet, and was running after them.

"He isn't coming," said Frank, catching sight of the strange man, standing on the shore of the island, near where the boys had landed. "I guess he isn't going to chase us."

"It's a good thing, too," panted Bob.

"Why?" asked Frank, with a smile.

"Because if he'd come after me I'd have hit him with **my** skates; that's what I would!" boasted Bob.

"What did you run for then?" asked Sammy.

"'Cause you fellows did. Think I was going to stay there all alone and tackle him? I was not! So he isn't coming after us; eh?"

"No, there he stands," answered Sammy, peering through the darkness. They could just make out the old hermit, and as they looked they saw him shake his fist at them. Then he disappeared behind a tree.

"Well, come on, let's get on our skates and make for home," proposed Frank. "It's getting late, and the folks will be worried."

"That's right," agreed Sammy. "But I guess, after this, you fellows will believe what I tell you about hermits and—and things; won't you?"

"Well, you were right about the hermit," admitted Frank. "He sure is there. But that doesn't say there's treasure on the island."

"Treasure! Of course there is!" insisted Sammy. "Did you ever know of a hermit where there wasn't treasure? That's what hermits are for—to guard a treasure."

"Well, maybe," said Bob, slowly. "Anyhow if there *was* treasure on the island, I wouldn't want to hunt for it if that terrible old man was guarding it."

"I would," spoke Sammy, bravely. "Maybe he doesn't look so scary by daytime. I'm coming up again."

"I'm not!" exclaimed Bob. But none of the boys knew how soon they would again visit Pine Island, nor what strange adventures they would have there.

They soon had their skates on, and struck off across the frozen lake toward Fairview and their homes. It grew darker and darker, but presently the stars came out, and as the ice was glaring white they did not have much trouble seeing their way.

Reaching home, they found their parents just beginning to get alarmed about them, fearing there had been some accident on the ice. The boys told of their adventure, but in their own homes, with the lamps lighted, and warm fires glowing, the encounter with the hermit did not seem so terrible as it had at the time it happened.

"If I see him again I'm going to speak to him," declared Sammy. "I'm going to ask him why he doesn't want anybody on that part of the island."

"Better not," advised Sammy's father. "He may be harmless if let alone, but his mind may be diseased, and if you annoy him he might do you some harm."

"Well, I'll ask Mr. Jessup, the hunter, about him then," decided Sammy, and his father thought this might be all right.

There were happy days in Fairview now. Winter had set in to stay, it seemed, and there was skating and coasting enough to satisfy everyone.

Sammy and his chums told their friends of their trip to Pine Island, and of having seen the hermit, and several of the smaller boys of their acquaintance shivered with fear. A number of the larger boys, including Jed Burr, at once said they were going up and see if they could not find the hermit themselves.

Jed Burr, I might say, was quite a different boy now. He no longer was a bully, tormenting those younger or weaker than himself. His suspension, and the apology he had had to make, seemed to have taken good effect on him.

Then, too, he was looked upon somewhat as a hero, from having gone back to rescue the little boy at the time when it was thought the school was going to be toppled over by an earthquake.

"I like Jed now," said Sammy, one day.

"So do I," added Bob.

"He's real kind," said Frank. "Yesterday I had to bring home from the store a heavy basket of potatoes. Jed met me and carried it for me."

And Jed himself was glad that he had "turned over a new leaf." He was finding out that it is more fun, in the end, to be good than to be bad. And Jed's teacher was glad, too, for he gave her less trouble.

So, as I say, Jed and some of the bigger boys in the school, having heard of the experience of Sammy and his chums, had decided to go to Pine Island, to see if they could not find the hermit.

"Will you come along, Sammy, and show us where you saw him?" asked Jed.

"I will, if Bob and Frank will," was the answer.

But Bob and Frank would not go, and Sammy would not go without them. So Jed and his chums set off by themselves on their skates for Pine Island. They were gone nearly the whole of one Saturday, but when they came back they were disappointed, for they had seen nothing of the hermit.

"I guess you fellows dreamed it," said Jed, with a laugh. "Or else you saw shadows on the snow."

"We did not dream it!" declared Sammy.

"And can shadows holler at you?" Bob wanted to know.

"No, but maybe you heard an echo," suggested Jed.

"There couldn't be any echo unless somebody said something," spoke Frank, "and we heard that hermit speak as plain as anything, and we weren't saying a word."

"Well, it's queer we didn't see him," returned Jed.

Several days passed—days filled with many winter joys. Sammy and his two chums made themselves skate-sails. They took some sticks, and stretched cloth over them, something between the sail of a boat and a kite in shape. Then, holding these sails in their hands, they would let the wind blow them

over the ice. Thus they could skate without getting tired out.

Then there were sleighing parties, and coasting races on the big hill back of the schoolhouse. Sammy and his chums made themselves a bob, by fastening two low clipper sleds together with a long plank. It had a steering wheel, and a bell that sounded, as the bob went down hill, to warn everyone to get out of the way.

More snowball battles, and the building of snow houses and snow-men made up other fun for the boys and girls.

"I'm going to make the biggest snow house that ever was put up in Fairview!" exclaimed Sammy, one day. Like everything else he did, or had a part in, Sammy wanted his undertakings to be out of the ordinary.

"All right, we'll help you," said Bob and Frank.

They started the snow house in Sammy's yard, as he had proposed it. A dozen large snowballs were rolled, and put in line on four sides of a square. These were to be the walls of the house. The walls were made quite high. Then inside of them was piled all the snow the boys could gather. They cleared the ground for some distance about the house, and Sammy's father said if only they would work as hard cleaning off the sidewalks in winter, they would be doing a good thing.

"But cleaning sidewalks isn't any fun," declared Sammy, and his chums agreed with him.

They were going to make a big snow pile inside the walls of balls, and then hollow it out, leaving a roof of snow on top. This would be the house. Besides the door, by which the snow would be shoveled out, there were also to be windows.

All went well for a time. Then, when the house was nearly finished, Sammy's father came out to look at it.

"You're making your roof too thin, boys," he said. "It will fall in on you."

"Oh, I guess not!" boasted Sammy. "We want to have the walls and roof thin, as that gives us more room inside."

"Well, you mind what I'm telling you," said Mr. Brown.

Hardly had he spoken when Sammy, who was using his shovel to scrape some snow from the ceiling of the house, sent his shovel right through the roof.

"Oh!" he cried.

He did not have a chance to say anything more, for, just then, the whole roof fell in, burying himself as well as Frank and Bob out of sight.

"I told you so!" cried Mr. Brown.

However, little harm was done, as the roof was too thin to hurt any of the boys. They began to dig themselves out, with Mr. Brown's help, and soon were outside the ruins of their snow house.

"That's too bad," said Bob.

"It sure is," agreed Frank.

"And it was all my fault," admitted Sammy, with a sigh.

"Never mind," went on Bob. "We can put boards across the walls, now, for a roof, and cover them with snow."

"I think that would be the safest plan," spoke Mr. Brown. The boys had much fun after that, in their snow house.

"Say, when are we going to take another trip to Pine Island, and look for—" began Sammy Brown one day, about a week after the falling in of the snow house roof.

"Were you going to say look for the hermit?" asked Bob, with a laugh.

"No, I meant Mr. Jessup, the hunter. I think it would be jolly to go up and camp there."

"It would," agreed Frank. "But we have to go to school. It wouldn't be much fun just to go for one day. I'd like to stay a week."

"Well maybe we could go when the Christmas vacation comes," suggested Sammy. "I'm going to ask my folks, anyhow."

"So will I!" cried Frank.

"And I," added Bob.

They were on their way home from school that afternoon, talking over the proposed trip to Pine Island, when, as they came within sight of Rainbow Lake, Sammy uttered a cry.

"Look!" he exclaimed, pointing. "The ice must have all melted. There's a sailboat on the lake!"

"Sailboat! That isn't a sailboat!" said Bob.

"No, it's an ice yacht!" cried Frank. "Come on down and let's see who has it. Maybe they'll give us a ride."

The boys broke into a run, and soon saw that what Frank had said was true. It was an ice-boat—one built with runners, like big skates, and a sail, fixed on a mast, standing up in a platform—shaped like a triangle. The boat was skimming swiftly over the ice.

"Say, that's all right!" cried Sammy. "I'm going to make one of those!"

"There he goes again!" laughed Frank.

"Well, I am—you'll see!" went on Sammy. "Come closer, and we'll look how they're made. That seems to be a new kind."

The three chums went out on the ice toward the skimming boat.

Suddenly there was a cracking sound, a deep boom, like a shot from a distant cannon, and a wide crack appeared in the ice, just in front of the ice-boat. Before those aboard could turn aside, the front part of the craft had slid into the cold waters of the lake, and several figures were seen floundering about.

"Come on!" cried Sammy, breaking into a run. "We've got to help save them!"

CHAPTER VI

A FINE CHANCE

THE boys, following Sammy, broke into a run. With anxious eyes they looked toward where the ice-boat had broken through a great crack in the frozen surface of Rainbow Lake.

"There's somebody climbing out!" cried Frank, as he saw a figure pull itself up on the side of the overturned boat.

"But there are some others there!" exclaimed Sammy. "We've got to save them all! There's nobody else around!"

It was true. That part of the lake was deserted at this moment.

"How are we going to save them?" asked Bob, as he plodded on.

"I don't know how, but we've got to do it!" panted Sammy.

"Don't go too close, or the ice will give way with us," cautioned Frank.

"I was thinking of that," answered Sammy.

They were now nearing the boat. Part of it rested on firm ice, but the front part sagged into the water, and the sail was half covered. Sitting astride of the side of the craft was a boy whom Sammy and his chums recognized as Jed Burr.

"Anybody else there?" cried Sammy, as he came to a stop, and looked at the ice to see if it would be safe to go further.

"Yes!" cried Jed, as well as he could from shivering, for he was wet through, and very cold. "Hank Blair is there, and Jim Eaton!"

"Can you get 'em out?" asked Sammy. "Shall we run for help?"

"Time help gets here they'll be gone!" groaned Jed. "Oh, why didn't I see that crack?"

"Help! Help us out!" came faintly from the black water that could be seen through the opening of the ice.

Sammy and his chums, looking under the mast of the overturned ice-boat, saw two forms struggling in the water. Their hands clung to the edges of the ice, only to have it break off in their grasp. Then they would bob under again.

"We've got to save them!" cried Sammy.

"We can't!" moaned Bob. "Let's go for help!"

"Can you reach them?" asked Sammy of Jed, paying no attention to what Bob said.

"I could if I had a rope to throw to them. But I can't get a rope! Oh, what shall I do?"

Sammy was doing some hard and quick thinking. Something like a rope was needed so that Jed could hold one end and throw the other to the floundering lads. A rope? Where could they get one now? True there were ropes on the ice-boat, but they could not be reached.

"I have it!" cried Sammy. "Our book straps! Quick, fellows, take the straps off your books!"

It was a bright idea. The straps were the very thing needed.

Now it happened that Sammy and his chums had very long book straps, much longer than were really needed. They were at least a yard in length, and often only a few books were carried in them. But the boys had a habit of also including their skates, and other playthings, in with their books, so they declared that long straps were needed.

Frank and Bob at once grasped Sammy's plan. In a trice they had loosed the buckles, and handed him their straps.

He fastened the three together and thus had a leather rope almost ten feet long.

"That's the idea!" cried Jed, still shivering on the side of the ice-boat. "I can reach 'em with that!"

"You'd better—better reach us—s-s-s-soon!" called Jim Eaton, his teeth chattering with cold.

"That's—ri-ri-right!" shivered Hank Blair.

"Have you out in a jiffy now!" called Jed. "Throw me the strap, Sammy!"

"I'll bring it to you," said Sammy.

"No, don't. It mightn't be safe. The whole boat might slip into the water."

So Sammy tossed the three straps, fastened together as they were, to Jed, who caught them. The next moment, holding firmly to one end, Jed swung the other to Hank. Hank grasped it and carefully began to pull himself forward so he could reach the edge of the ice-boat. A very little help, from a person on a solid place, will allow a person in the water to lift himself up. The water buoys him, so to speak. You boys who have been in swimming know that if you keep low in the water you can support yourself by merely placing one finger on the edge of a pier or a boat.

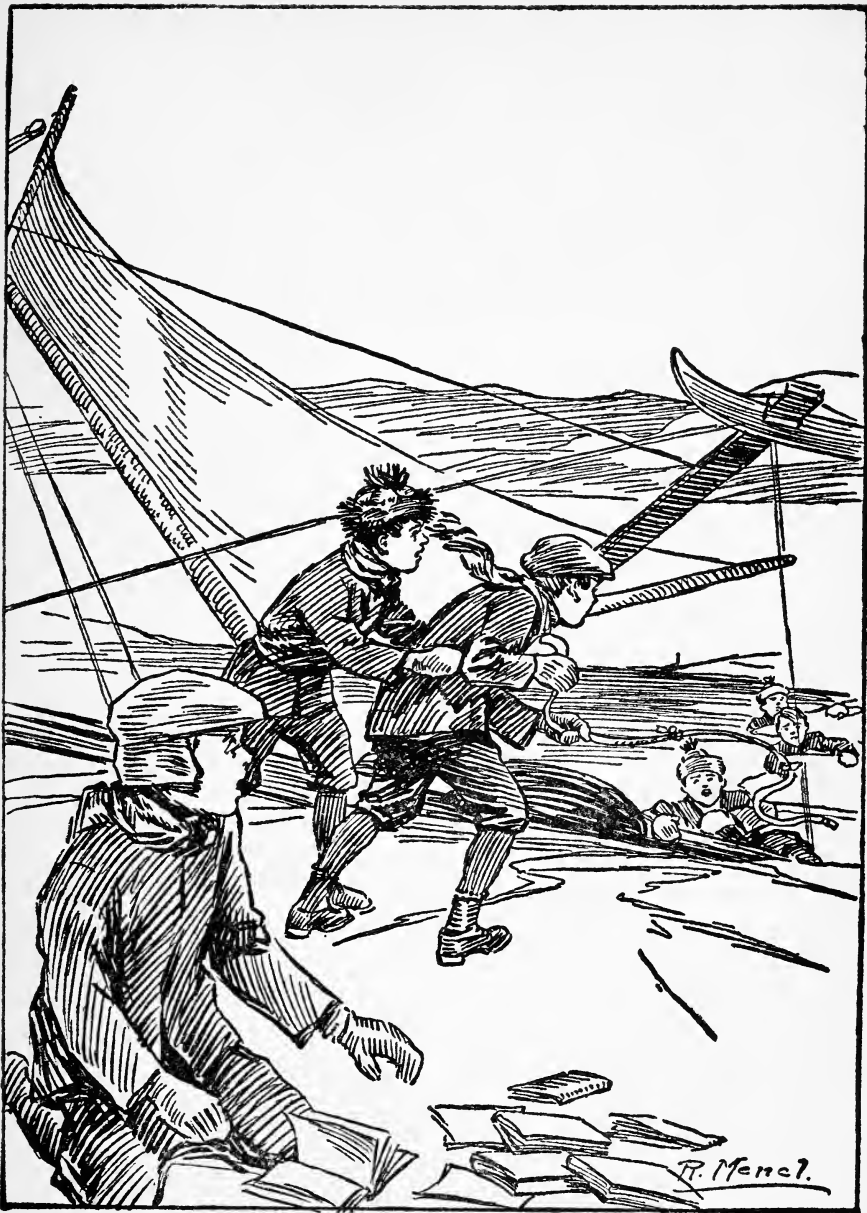
It was so with Hank. Slowly, by means of the straps, he was pulled up until he could grasp the ice-boat.

"I—I'm all right now," he panted. "Get after Jim!"

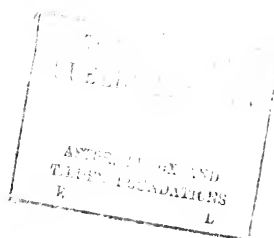
He released his hold of the strap, and it was tossed to Jim. And not any too soon, either, for Jim could not hold on much longer. He was weak from the cold.

But he, too, was soon safely towed to a place where he could grasp the half-submerged ice-boat. All three was now comparatively safe.

"Now look out!" called Jed, as he threw back to Tommy



Sammy tossed the three straps, fastened together.



the buckled straps. "I'm going to work my way to the solid ice, and you two fellows follow. Can you do it?"

"We've got to!" cried Jim, desperately.

"Go ahead—I'm with you!" exclaimed Hank.

Slowly Jed edged his way to where the stern of the ice-boat rested on the solid, frozen surface. In a few seconds he was in safety, though he was wet and shivering, and his clothes were beginning to freeze to him.

"Come on!" he called to Hank and Jim, and they followed, but more slowly, for they were quite exhausted. But soon they, too, were safe.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Sammy Brown.

"So am I!" echoed his two chums.

"And maybe we aren't also, youngsters!" chattered Jed. "We won't forget this on your part!"

"I should s-s-s-say n-n-n-not!" stammered Hank. "Those straps saved our lives!"

"Well, you'd better run home as soon as you can," advised Frank, "or you'll catch your death of cold."

"That's good advice," said Jed. "Come on. We can leave the ice-boat where it is for a while. I'm going to run and see if I can get warmed up. See you later, Sammy!"

He set off on a trot toward shore, his two soaked friends following. Sammy and his chums remained to look at the ice-boat. Some men and boys came up then, too late, however, to help in the rescue. Then the men got ropes and pulled the ice-boat up on the hard surface, whence it was hauled to where it was kept tied up. Some of the ropes had broken, so that it could not be sailed.

"Sort of a queer accident," remarked Jerry Grow, who, with his dog Prince, had come up with the crowd. "Those fellows could have sailed almost anywhere else on Rainbow Lake and not gone through. But they had to pick out a spot

over a spring, where it never freezes very thick, and of course they went through. There ought to be a mark put up here to warn ice-boats and skaters to keep off."

"We'll put one up," said Sammy, and a few days later they did mark the danger spot in the ice. It had frozen over again, and could not have been noticed except for the red box which Sammy and his chums placed there. Thus further accidents were avoided.

As for Jed and his companions, prompt action saved them from anything worse than slight colds. They got home, took hot baths, drank plenty of hot lemonade and, in a day or so, were out again.

It appeared that the three larger boys had bought the ice-boat at second-hand from a man in another town. It was the first time they had tried it that they sailed over the thin ice, and went in.

"But it won't happen again," said Jed to Sammy, when he and Jim and Hank again met the three chums. "Thanks to you chaps we'll know where the danger spot is now."

"And thanks to them that we're not down there under the ice now," added Hank, with a slight shiver.

"That's right," chimed in Jim. "Say, any time you boys want a ride in our ice-boat, let us know."

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Jed. "Maybe you fellows would like to take a sail. It's perfectly safe on the lake now, and we've fixed the boat where she was broken that day."

"Is the ice safe?" asked Sammy.

"Sure," answered Jim. "It's frozen ever so much thicker than it was the day we went out, and besides, we won't go near the danger spot. Don't you want to come for a trip?"

"Fellows, I've an idea!" cried Sammy, looking at his chums.

"What, another?" asked Bob.

"Yes," went on Sammy, with a grin. "This is a fine chance for us. Christmas vacation starts next week. Why can't we go to Pine Island on the ice-boat, camp there a few days with Mr. Jessup, and have Jed come back for us—that is if he will?" and he looked at the former bully.

"Of course we'll come for you!" he exclaimed. "We'd do anything for you boys. We'll take you to Pine Island any time you say!"

"Then it's all settled!" spoke Sammy, though it was far from that. "We'll go camping with Mr. Jessup, and—we'll find out the secret of the old hermit," he added in a whisper to his chums.

CHAPTER VII

AT CAMP MYSTERY

"SAMMY, do you really think we can do it?"

"How did you happen to think of it?"

Thus Frank and Bob questioned Sammy as they walked away from Jed and the larger boys, after getting the promise of the use of the ice-boat any time they wanted it.

"Of course I think we can do it," answered Sammy. "And I don't just know how I happened to think of it, except that I knew if we did go camping on Pine Island we'd have to take some extra clothes with us, and maybe something to eat, and we couldn't very well do that and skate. So I thought of the ice-boat. It'll hold a lot."

"It's a fine idea!" exclaimed Frank. "Now the next thing is to see if our folks will let us go."

The boys were a little worried about that part of the program. True, they had been in a number of adventures of late, and their parents had not objected to their going off on several trips during the Summer; trips, too, that kept them away over night.

But now it was Winter, and sleeping away from their warm beds might mean severe colds, if nothing worse. So all three of the boys were a bit doubtful about being allowed to go.

"I'll tell you what let's do," proposed Sammy.

"What?" asked Frank.

"Let's go see Mrs. Blake," he went on. "We'll tell her we want to go up and call on her brother. She said he'd be glad to have us, and we'll get her to ask our folks if we can't go. They'll be sure to let us then."

"Good idea, Sammy!" cried Frank.

"I believe that will work!" declared Bob, slyly sticking out his foot to trip up Sammy. But the latter was too quick for him, and it was Bob himself who went down in a snowbank.

"I—I'll wash your face for that!" he cried, as he scrambled to his feet and made a rush for Sammy. But at that instant old Mr. Dolby, popularly called a miser, came unexpectedly along, and Bob ran full tilt into him, knocking him down.

"Whew!" whistled Frank. "Now you have gone and done it!"

The miserly old man struggled to his feet. All the boys were afraid to go near to help him, for fear he would use his cane on them.

"Ah, ha!" he spluttered as he got up, brushing the snow from his clothes. "Ah, ha! Up to your old tricks again; are you? Knocking folks down! I'll fix you for this! I'll have you all arrested, that's what I will!"

He shook his cane at the frightened boys.

"I—I didn't mean to!" faltered Bob, as he picked up the angry man's hat and gave it to him.

"Didn't mean to! Humph! That's what ye allers say! But I'll have the law on ye jest the same! I'll have ye all arrested! Look at my hat—all snow!"

"It'll brush off," said Sammy.

"Hold your tongue! Don't speak to me!" snapped the angry man, as he stalked off down the street. "I'll attend to your cases."

For a moment the three chums remained looking after him.

Then, as he noted the direction taken by the miser, Frank said anxiously:

"He's going toward the police station. Maybe he will have us arrested."

"He can't have you two taken in," said Bob. "I'm the only one that knocked him down."

"Huh! S'pose we'd let you stand it all?" demanded Sammy. "We'll all stick together. But come on. There's no use waiting for trouble. If he does make a complaint let the officer find us. I'm going home and ask my mother if I can go to Pine Island."

He turned aside, but stopped a moment later to pick up a paper from the snow. He unfolded it and exclaimed:

"Why! it's a check—a check for ten dollars, and it's for Mr. Dolby! He must have dropped it."

"Say! This is just the thing!" cried Frank, with ready wit. "Let's run and give it to him. Maybe he won't be mad then."

There was no need to race after the old miser, for a moment later he turned the corner, coming toward the boys. He seemed very much in a hurry, and quite excited.

"Have you found it? Did I drop it here? If you boys have found it and don't give it up—" he spluttered.

"Is this it?" asked Sammy quickly, holding out the check.

The miser fairly snatched it from the boy's grasp.

"That's it! Where'd you get it? You must have took it from my pocket when you knocked me down!" the peevish man exclaimed.

"We did not!" cried Sammy, in righteous anger. "We found it in the snow where it fell. And knocking you down was an accident."

Perhaps the miser realized this, or perhaps the joy at find-

ing the ten dollar check he thought he had lost made him more humane. At any rate he growled out:

"Well, maybe you couldn't help it. But you boys shouldn't be so rough. I won't have you arrested this time, but I will next. I'm an old man, and I can't stand bein' knocked around rough-like. Here—here's a penny for you for findin' my check," and he fumbled in an old wallet.

"No, thank you!" exclaimed Sammy, turning aside. "We don't want any reward."

"Oh, all right," said the miser, and with a sigh of relief he put the cent back in his purse. "Boys have too much money now-a-days as it is."

He shuffled off, followed by the indignant glances of the lads.

"Isn't he the limit!" murmured Frank.

"He sure is," agreed Bob.

"You want to stop your fooling, Bob," advised Sammy. "You nearly got us into trouble."

"All right—I'll be good," promised the fun-loving Bob. But his chums knew that it would be only for a short time at best. However, they were used to it now.

The three soon forgot the little happening with the miser, in their hurry to get home and find out if they could go camping on Pine Island. School would close for Christmas in a day or so, and there was much to do to get ready.

It was no easy matter for the boys to get their parents' consent to the trip. They had to "tease" very hard. But their plan of getting Mrs. Blake to put in a good word for them was not in vain.

"Of course you ought to let the boys go," she said, when she called in turn on Mrs. Bouncer, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Haven. "My brother will be delighted to see them, and he'll take the

best of care of them. It will do them good. They're only boys once, and they have studied well this term."

So it came about that permission was given. The boys were to take along plenty of warm clothing. As for food, Mrs. Blake said her brother had plenty in his cabin. She had written that the boys were coming, and he had laid in a good stock of provisions.

"Huray!" cried Sammy, when the matter was settled, "we can go!"

Arrangements were made, and Jed and his larger chums promised to take the three boys to the island on the ice-boat. The lake was frozen over thickly now, and there was no danger.

School closed, Christmas came, with all its joys, and two days after the holiday the little party of three, in charge of the older boys, set off on the ice-boat.

It was a fine sunny day, though cold, and there was a good wind, so they were only a comparatively short time in getting to the upper end of Pine Island. As they neared the dock in front of the cabin where Mr. Jessup had his camp, Sammy and his chums kept a bright lookout. None of them admitted as much, but they were all thinking they might see the mysterious hermit.

"There's your friend, I guess," said Jed, as the ice-boat came up into the wind, and headed for the dock. "That's Mr. Jessup waving to you. I know him."

A tall man, with a gun under his arm, was standing on the edge of the little pier that extended out into the frozen lake.

"Yes, that's him," said Sammy, who knew the hunter from the way in which Mrs. Blake had described her brother.

"I wish we were you chaps," spoke Jim Eaton. "You'll have no end of good times here."

"That's what they will," added Hank.

But neither they, nor Sammy and his chums, dreamed of the queer, as well as good, times in store.

The ice-boat came to a stop, the three small boys got off, and the craft veered away again.

"Well, boys, glad to see you!" called Mr. Jessup, cordially as he met them. "Welcome to Camp Mystery!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE OLD MANSION

SAMMY BROWN and his chums looked queerly at one another. Then they glanced at Mr. Jessup. He smiled as he peered at them from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Camp Mystery, did you say?" asked Sammy, wonderingly.

"That's what I said," was the answer. "But don't get frightened, I don't believe the mystery will hurt you."

"Is there really a mystery?" asked Sammy, eagerly. "Is there a—a ghost—or something like that?"

Mr. Jessup laughed heartily.

"No need to ask your name," he chuckled. "You're Sammy Brown? My sister told me all about you."

Sammy blushed.

"Well—er—well," he stammered, "I only thought——"

"No harm done at all!" went on the hunter, still laughing. "My sister said one of you boys was always on the lookout for something strange, like buried treasure, or a lost diamond mine. Well, we haven't got either of those things on this end of Pine Island, whatever they may have down below. But that's how I guessed your name, Sammy."

"And now let me see, you ought to be Bob Bouncer, by rights," and he looked at Bob with his head on one side. "How about it?"

"That's my name," admitted the owner of it.

"I thought so. Then of course, as you're the only one left," he said to Frank, "you're Mr. Haven's son."

"How did you guess my name?" asked Bob.

"Oh, my sister said Bob was the one with a twinkle in his eye that meant mischief. You've got it, so you're him. I hope you don't cut-up too much. I don't mind sitting down on a pin once in a while, but I don't like to find mud turtles in my bed——"

"I don't do any of those things!" cried Bob, in confusion.

"No, I s'pose you don't, but it's just as well to warn you," and by the merry twinkle in Mr. Jessup's eyes the boys knew he was only joking.

"Now then," he went on "forward for Camp Mystery! Got all your luggage?"

"All we need, I guess," answered Sammy. Each of the boys had a good-sized valise. "But what makes you call your place Camp Mystery?" asked the lad. "Your sister didn't say anything about that."

"No, for it's only lately that I've had occasion to call it that. You see——"

But Mr. Jessup was interrupted by a crashing sound in the underbrush at one side of the path, and from the bushes there was shaken down a shower of the light snow that had fallen the night before.

"Look out!" cried Frank, starting back.

"Maybe it's him!" added Bob.

"Don't run!" advised Sammy.

Mr. Jessup stared in surprise at the three lads, but before he could ask them the reason for their strange remarks there burst out from the bushes a fine hunting dog, who ran straight for the man, wagging his tail in delight.

"Oh, so there you are, Maybel!" exclaimed Mr. Jessup. "I was just wondering what had become of you."

"Is that your dog?" asked Sammy.

"Did he make that noise?" inquired Frank.

"Yes. What did you think it was—a ghost?" Mr. Jessup wanted to know. Once more he looked strangely at the boys.

"We—we thought," began Bob, and then he glanced at Sammy, as if asking him to explain the thoughts of his chums.

"Oh, you thought maybe it was the mystery; is that it?" Mr. Jessup wanted to know. "No, it isn't that. The mystery, if that's what I am to call it, doesn't make that much noise. It's a very quiet sort of a mystery; the one in my camp."

The boys were puzzled. Clearly there was more than one queer thing, to be gotten to the bottom of, on Pine Island.

The dog was frisking about, soon making friends with the boys.

"Quiet now, Maybe," cautioned the hunter. "We can't scare up anything to-day. Down, sir!"

"Is—is his name Maybe?" asked Bob, thinking there might be a joke attached to the animal's title.

"It is," said Mr. Jessup. "You see I call him Maybe because when we go out hunting—he and I—maybe we'll have luck, and—maybe we won't. It's been mostly not, of late, though maybe my luck will change, now that you boys have come.

"But come. Tell me what you thought it was when you heard the dog make a noise in the bushes."

"And then will you tell us what the mystery is?" asked Sammy.

"Of course. I'll tell you first, if you like. To be brief I've been missing things from my camp—food mostly, though the other night one of my best blankets was taken. And the funny part of it is that I can't get a trace of the thief. Things disappear when I'm away from camp, and sometimes when I'm asleep. It's all quite strange, so that's why I call this Camp

Mystery. I wish I could find out who is at the bottom of it."

Sammy was eager to relate his story now.

"Perhaps we can tell you!" he eagerly exclaimed, when Mr. Jessup nodded to show that he had finished. "It must be the hermit who's taking your things."

If he and his chums expected Mr. Jessup to show surprise at the mention of the hermit they were disappointed. Mr. Jessup only shook his head.

"So you've seen him, too," he murmured. "He's showing himself more often of late. I hope he doesn't get into trouble."

"Who?" asked Frank.

"The hermit."

"Oh, then you know him?" asked Sammy. His expected surprise had amounted to nothing. He was rather disappointed.

"Oh, yes, I know him," admitted the hunter, "but that isn't saying I know what he's up to. That part is queer, I admit."

"Who is he?" asked Sammy, and he briefly told how they had encountered the strange old man, with his white hair and beard.

"Well, his name is Franklin Addison," answered Mr. Jessup, "and he has been here for some time. Just when he came I don't remember, but I know I ran across him one day, and he ordered me off the island. Of course I didn't go, owning considerable land here. So I stood my ground, and explained matters.

"Then Mr. Addison grew more reasonable. He told me he had come to live here to be away from the world, and he showed me a little hut he had made for himself, on a small piece of land he said was his. A poor enough place it is, but he seems to like it. Since then, though we haven't met often, we have been better friends. I let him alone, and he lets me alone. He lives about a mile from here, in a lonesome place.

"What he is doing here I can't make out. Maybe he's **here** for his health. There are some folks, you know, who believe in getting off alone like that, and living as much out of doors as they can."

"I thought maybe he was the mystery," explained Sammy, "and that he had been taking your things."

"No," answered the hunter, "Mr. Addison wouldn't do a thing like that. He has often asked me for food, and I have given it to him. Then again he has given me money to buy things for him when I go to the mainland. He isn't the thief, I'm sure."

"Maybe it's a bear—or some wild animal," suggested Bob.

"I wish it was!" exclaimed the hunter. "If it was maybe we could get it—Maybe and I. But there are no animal tracks, and anyhow the biggest beasts here on Pine Island now are foxes. No you'll have to guess again, boys."

"Well, it will give us something to look up," said Sammy. "We can solve that mystery, and the one about the hermit, too."

He was quite delighted over the prospect, as his chums could easily tell by the light in his eyes. Give Sammy a mystery, or put him on the trail of buried treasure, be it ever so small, and he was happy.

"Well, come on to Camp Mystery," suggested Mr. Jessup. "You must be hungry—I know I am."

With Maybe, the dog, running on ahead, and the hunter and the boys bringing up in the rear, the little procession started off along the snowy trail.

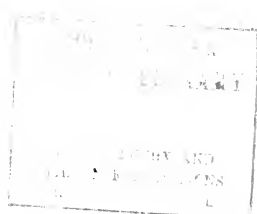
They went on for perhaps a mile, when, through the trees, the boys caught sight of a large house—a mansion in size.

"Is that your cabin?" asked Sammy. "It's big!"

"No, my shack can't compare with that in build," answered the hunter. "That's an old deserted mansion. It used to be a



"Is that your cabin?" asked Sammy.



sort of hotel, or boarding house, but it hasn't been used as such in a good many years. It didn't pay.

"I'm a sort of care-taker of it, and I have one or two rooms fitted up that I use when my shack gets filled. But the rest of the place is deserted, except for the bats and rats."

The boys came to a stop in front of the old house. It was bare and gaunt, and looked lonesome. On most of the windows the sagging shutters flapped dismally. Somehow there seemed an air of mystery about the place. Sammy Brown's spirits rose.

"Fellows!" he cried, "maybe the mystery is in here!"

CHAPTER IX

SAMMY'S QUEER FIND

"HA! Ha!" laughed Mr. Jessup. "My sister was right about you, Sammy! You're always on the lookout for something odd."

Sammy was a little put out by the attention he had drawn to himself. But for all of that, he was not going to back down.

"Well," he said, "I only thought that if queer things had been going on around your camp, Mr. Jessup, maybe the person who had been taking your things would be hiding in here."

"So you're sure it's a person, and not a ghost; eh?" asked the hunter, with a smile.

"I don't believe in ghosts," declared Sammy.

"Good boy! Neither do I. But I'm sorry I can't agree with you that the mystery is in this old mansion."

"Why?" asked Sammy, who liked to stick to a point.

"Because the hermit and I, so far as I know, are the only ones on this part of the island. If there was anyone else here Maybe would have routed him out long ago; wouldn't you, Maybe?"

The dog barked, and wagged his tail.

But Sammy Brown was not satisfied. The old mansion, that had been used for a hotel, when the upper part of Pine Island had been a Summer resort, looked strange enough to hide any sort of a mystery, and the boy made up his mind he would get at the bottom of this one.

"We've got two things to do while we're here," Sammy told himself. "One is to find out who has been taking Mr. Jessup's stuff, and the other is to find out what the hermit is doing here."

Instead of being worried over the seemingly hard work, Sammy Brown was delighted. It gave him a chance to do something, and this always pleased the lad.

"Well," said Mr. Jessup, after a pause, "there's no need of staying here unless you want to. Better come on to my cabin, and we'll have a meal. Then you can unpack, and get your bearings. Are you warm enough?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Mother made me put on my heavy clothes."

"Well, it's a good idea, for it often gets quite chilly on the island. Now then, forward march!"

Sammy hung back a little.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Jessup, looking at him. "Do you see anything?"

"No," was the answer, "but I'd like a chance to go through that deserted mansion."

"Oh, you'll get it all right enough," the hunter promised him. "I've got to straighten up the few rooms I use in a day or so, and you boys can help."

"You see," he explained, "I'm expecting a company of gentlemen up in about two weeks to stay a few days, and there'll be more of them than I can keep in my cabin. So I've got to use a few rooms in the old mansion. I'll have to clean them up a bit though, first."

"Maybe we'll be in the way then," suggested Bob.

"Bless your heart, no! They're in no hurry to come, and I'm going to give you boys a good time first, just as I promised my sister I would. You did her a good turn, and this is the only way I can pay you back."

"So don't worry. Stay as long as you like, and you'll have all the chance you want, Sammy, to go through the old house. You won't find anything, though, I'll wager."

Sammy said nothing, but he made up his mind that if there was anything in the deserted mansion that would solve the mystery he would find it.

A short time later Mr. Jessup's cabin was reached. It stood in the midst of a grove of trees, and through them a glimpse could be had of the frozen lake. This part of the island was separated from the portion where the boys had played Robinson Crusoe by a wide stretch of marshland.

"Which way is the hermit's cabin from here?" asked Sammy, when he and his chums had put away the clothes they had brought in their satchels.

"Right back of here," answered Mr. Jessup. "But I wouldn't advise you to try to find it alone. There's a bad, swampy bog near it, and you might get mired."

"Wouldn't it be frozen over now?" asked Frank.

"No; and that's the funny part of it. That bog never freezes, even in the coldest weather. It's down in a sort of valley, and it's protected. So keep away from there unless I'm with you. There's another reason, too, for not looking up Mr. Addison."

"What is it?" asked Sammy, while the other boys waited eagerly for the answer.

"Well, he's a queer sort of man," went on Mr. Jessup. "He doesn't like company, and he even objects to me, sometimes, though I seldom bother him. Just how he would take to you boys I don't know."

"He didn't take to us at all the first time he saw us," spoke Bob.

"I should say not!" cried Frank. "He ordered us away."

"And we went—in a hurry," added Sammy.

"Yes," remarked the hunter, with a smile. "Then I'd give him a wide berth. I don't just know what his rights are on this island. I know he doesn't bother me, and he keeps off my land, except when he wants to borrow something, or have me buy food for him. So I don't bother him, and I'd advise you boys to do the same."

"All right," answered Sammy. He did not exactly promise, and the truth of the matter was that he made up his mind to find out more about the queer hermit, as well as about the mystery and the deserted mansion, as soon as he could.

And his chums felt the same way.

"Well, anyhow, we're here!" exclaimed Sammy, a little later, while they sat about a campfire in front of the cabin, and ate the meal which Mr. Jessup got ready. "We're here, and we're going to have some fun!"

"That's what we are!" cried Frank. "What can we do first?"

"Well, I'm going to do a little hunting for rabbits this afternoon," said Mr. Jessup. "You boys can come along, if you like."

"Fine!" cried Sammy.

"I wish we had guns and could hunt," said Sammy.

"You're a bit too young for firearms," said the hunter. "Later on, when you grow up, you can have 'em, and I'll show you how to shoot."

With this the boys had to be content, though it must be confessed they looked on with eager and envious eyes while Mr. Jessup got his gun ready for the little expedition.

Maybe, the dog, as soon as he saw the preparations, frisked about in delight. He barked, and ran to and fro from the cabin, as if asking everyone to hurry.

"All right, old fellow," said Mr. Jessup, soothingly. "We'll soon be with you."

Pine Island, as I have said, was a large one in the midst of Rainbow Lake. Years before, many years, when only the Indians roved about that part of the country, it had been part of the main land, so scientists said. They had located a reef in the lake, and their explanation was, that, through the raising of the waters of the lake, the point of land became surrounded by water, and was made into an island.

It had happened suddenly, and many large, wild animals, as well as some smaller ones, had been trapped there. In time the wild animals, such as deer and bears, had been killed off, and were never replenished. But the small game, such as rabbits, squirrels, opossums and raccoons, were still rather plentiful. The island was protected by game laws, now, so that the supply was not killed off.

Then, too, there was some valuable timber on the island, and Mr. Jessup cut that in the Summer when there was no hunting. He floated it down to Fairview where he sold it.

Off through the snow-covered woods started Mr. Jessup and the boys, with Maybe frisking about here and there, trying to scare up a rabbit or a partridge for his master to shoot. For a time luck was poor, and then some pheasants were flushed, and Mr. Jessup brought down two fat ones.

"Hurray!" cried Bob. "Now we'll have a fine dinner!"

Later on the hunter got two fine rabbits, and oh! how the boys wished they were big enough to have guns!

"I'm coming up here every hunting season, as soon as I'm old enough to shoot!" cried Frank.

"So am I!" exclaimed Sammy and Bob.

As he did not shoot game to sell, and as he had enough for present needs, Mr. Jessup, as all good hunters do in such cases, ceased the use of his gun. With his rabbits and pheasants on his back he led the boys on the return trip. As they came to the old mansion, Sammy asked:

"Could we go in now, Mr. Jessup, and look around?"

"I guess so," he answered. "But don't stay too late. It gets dark early now, you know. I'll keep on to my cabin."

Eagerly the boys entered the old deserted house, Mr. Jessup letting them take his key. As he had said, they found several rooms fitted up with beds, and a few pieces of furniture. These were the apartments used by those of the hunting parties who could not find bunks in the cabin.

"Now let's begin at the top of the house, and work down," proposed Sammy, when they had looked about the lower floor. "Maybe we can find something of the mystery."

"Maybe—the dog—yes," laughed Bob.

"Oh, you just wait!" exclaimed Sammy. "I'll find something yet."

But it did not seem that he was going to, at first. Room after room was deserted, the once gay wallpaper hanging in mouldy strips. Broken shutters flapped in the wind, and there was ruin on all sides. In some rooms were bits of broken furniture, and in others only heaps of rubbish.

"I shouldn't like to stay here," said Bob, with a little shiver.

"Me, either," added Frank.

They were up in the top story now, and had found nothing.

"Well, I suppose we may as well go down," spoke Sammy, in disappointed tones. "There's nothing here."

"Unless it's in one of those secret rooms you read about," said Bob. "This mansion looks old enough to have one of those."

Sammy did not reply. He was looking at a spot on the wall, and suddenly he put forth his hand and pressed on a carved bit of moulding.

To his surprise, as well as to the surprise of his chums, the wall seemed to slide away. There was a rumbling sound, and a hole came into view.

Then, as the boys' eyes became used to the gloom, they saw that they were looking into a room of the existence of which they had never guessed.

"Look!" cried Bob excitedly. "Sammy's found it—the secret room!"

"Yes, and see what's in it!" cried Sammy, as he pointed to a heap of odd-looking objects in one corner. "Fellows, maybe this is the mystery!"

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM

THE boys hung back for a moment on the threshold of the room Sammy had so strangely discovered. Truth to tell they were a little afraid to enter, and no one could have blamed them. For surely there were some queer looking objects in the secret apartment.

That it was a secret room, intended to be hidden from the ordinary person going through the old house, was plain. As one looked at the wall, before Sammy had pushed on what must have been a secret spring, it did not seem different from the rest of the building. There had been a little piece of carved wood sticking out, and this must have worked on some springs and levers to slide back the hidden door.

"Say, this is great!" cried Sammy, delighted at his discovery.

"It sure is," agreed Bob. "How'd you come to do it?"

"I just happened to," answered Sammy. "I saw that carved wood bulging out, and it looked as though it was meant to press on. So I did."

"You're a great one!" cried Frank. "You're all the time talking about finding something mysterious, but it never before amounted to anything. This time you did hit it, Sammy Brown!"

"And I guess you fellows won't laugh at me any more; will you?"

"I won't," said Bob, with a sigh, wishing he had discovered the secret room.

"And look what's in there, fellows!" went on Sammy. "Maybe now we can find out how and who has been taking Mr. Jessup's stuff!"

There was indeed an odd collection of things in the secret room. Besides a bed, table and some chairs, there was on the floor, and on the wall-shelves, some tubes, with shining pieces of glass in the ends. There were tin boxes, springs, long pieces of wire, black wooden boxes, and many other strange things. One of the tubes, with a glass in the end, seemed to be pointed directly at the boys, like some strange gun.

"Come on, let's go in!" urged Sammy. "Let's see what those things are."

For a moment his two chums looked at him, and then Frank said:

"Do you think it's safe to go in?"

"Why not?" asked Sammy.

"Well, that door might suddenly slide shut while we were in there, or there might be a false bottom to the floor, and we'd drop through, or something like that," suggested Bob.

"Huh! You're as bad as you say I am, in thinking up things!" cried Sammy. "I say let's go in. We can put a stick, or something, across the sliding door, so that can't go shut on us."

"Well, maybe that's all right," agreed Bob. "But it sure would be hard luck if we got caught in here. No one would ever know where to find us."

"That's right," admitted Sammy, and, for a second or two, he was almost ready to give up the adventure.

But his desire to see what the strange things were was so strong that he decided, by taking care, it would be all right.

"Oh, come on, fellows," he exclaimed. "Let's take a chance! I'll fix the door."

They found a piece of a broken shutter which they wedged

across the sliding doorway so that, even if they, or someone else, accidentally touched the hidden spring which sent the door to and fro, they would not be trapped.

"There, I guess that's all right," cried Sammy. "Now come on in!"

But Bob still hung back, though Sammy stepped across the door sill.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked the discoverer of the hidden room.

"I'm thinking that the floor might give way," faltered Bob.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Frank, taking sides with Sammy. "It must be solid, or how would it hold up the tables, chairs and the other things? I'm going in."

Bob would not be left behind, in the mysterious old house, so he followed his chums into the room. They advanced cautiously, and listened closely. There was no clicking sound, that might tell of hidden machinery.

"Pshaw! It's all right!" exclaimed Sammy, presently. "Now to see what those things are."

"Who do you s'pose put 'em there?" asked Frank, as they advanced toward the odd collection of things on the table.

"Counterfeiters!" exclaimed Sammy, promptly.

"Counterfeiters!" cried Frank. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," answered Sammy, with a calm smile, as though he knew it all. "This is a hidden place where some men have been making false coins, and maybe bad paper money too."

"You mean money that's no good?" asked Bob.

"Sure," replied Sammy. "Money that looks good, but which isn't—counterfeit money. I've read a lot about it. Fellows, we have discovered a counterfeiters' den!"

Sammy's chums looked rather frightened. It did seem as though they had stumbled upon some strange "den."

"Well, if counterfeiters work here, where are they, and where is some of the false money?" asked Bob. "I'd like to see some."

"Pooh! You don't s'pose they'd leave it around loose; do you?" asked Sammy. "They go out to spend it. That's probably where they are now. We'd better hurry and look around, and then we can go back to town and tell the police!"

Frank looked as though he did not quite agree with Sammy. It was often this way with the excitable small chap. He saw some things and imagined the rest. But in this case it was different. He had really discovered a secret room, and this was more than his chums had done. Perhaps, after all, he was right about the counterfeiters.

The boys advanced farther into the room. A nearer view of the strange tubes, with the glass in the ends, showed the latter to be large and bulging, like the lens of a bull's-eye lantern, or an automobile lamp. Attached to the tubes were black boxes, with a number of springs and levers fastened to them.

"Ha! I know what these are!" cried Frank. "They're telescopes, that's what they are. This isn't a counterfeiters' place at all. It's where one of those men live who look at the stars—astro—astor— Oh, you know what I mean," he added quickly.

"Astronomers," said Bob. "That's what it is, Sammy."

"It is not!" declared Sammy, quickly, bound not to give up his sensational idea. "Those may be telescopes all right, but if they are, the counterfeiters use them to look and see if the police are coming."

"Say, maybe that's right," agreed Frank, with a look of admiration at Sammy. "I never thought of that."

"Pooh! I did!" exclaimed the lad who had found the secret room. He was not going to lose any chance of showing

off, now that he had the opportunity. "That's what they are—telescopes for spying out when the counterfeiters are at work."

There were several small windows in the secret room, and they were rather high up from the floor. In fact Sammy and his chums had to drag out boxes to stand on, in order to see above the sills.

They paused a moment in looking over the strange apparatus to glance at the furniture in the room. As I have said, there was a bed, a table and several chairs. The bed did not look very nice, being covered with old blankets and some cut-up bags for covers. But it appeared to have been slept in, and was not actually dirty. In fact it was no worse than the place where the boys had slept when they were wrecked on the other end of Pine Island in the Summer.

"I wonder if they live here all the while?" spoke Bob.

"I guess they stay here when they're not away getting rid of the bad money," said Sammy. "They may come back any minute. We'd better be getting out of here!"

"Let's look around a little more," proposed Bob, who was getting braver now. "What can you see from the windows?"

The boys looked out. The windows of the secret room gave a view of only a dense mass of trees, and it was plain that this was the reason no one had ever found the apartment before. That side of the old mansion was opposite a deep and seldom-visited part of the woods.

"Well, we'll look at the counterfeiting machinery a little more, and then we'll go," suggested Sammy. "We'd better tell Mr. Jessup about this, and he can get the police after these fellows."

This seemed good advice to his chums, and they went back again to the table and shelves where the apparatus was spread out. They now examined it all more closely.

"Better not touch anything," advised Sammy, as Bob put out his hand to examine one of the tubes with glass in the end.

"Why not?" was asked.

"Because you might get a shock."

"A shock? How do you make that out?"

"Why there's some electric batteries attached to the things," said Sammy, pointing out the dry cells in their red pasteboard boxes.

"That's right," agreed Frank. "They're the same kind of batteries Jerry Grow has in his motor-boat. And they can give you a fierce shock, too."

"What, those little things?" asked Bob, in surprise.

"Sure," spoke Sammy. "You see the batteries aren't so strong in themselves, but when you run the current through a production coil——"

"Induction coil—not production," corrected Frank.

"Well, induction coil then," went on Sammy. "When the current from the electric battery goes through that, it gets stronger, and it sure does hurt."

"I know it does," agreed Bob, "for I got stung once on Jerry's boat, when he was putting in some new batteries. Oh, I won't touch these!"

Look as they did at the strange apparatus, the boys could not understand what it was for, unless, as Sammy said, it was used for making false money. Of course the chums had never seen any machinery for that purpose, and had no idea what was necessary. But Sammy's idea appealed to them.

"I guess we'd better be getting out now," said Frank, after a bit. "I shouldn't like to be caught here."

"Me either!" agreed Bob. "Let's go."

The boys started out of the mysterious room, excited over their strange find, Sammy in particular. This trip to Pine

Island was going to be more sensational than their previous one. They were sure of that.

"What'll we do about the door; leave it open?" asked Frank.

"No, we'll close it," decided Sammy, "that is if we can. Then the counterfeiters won't know we've been here, and they'll come back to their den, and we can help the police capture them."

"That's the way to talk!" cried Bob. "You're all right, Sammy!"

And then something happened. How it came about none of the boys knew, but Sammy admitted afterward that he must have touched one of the wires, or springs.

At any rate there was a blinding flash, a great cloud of white smoke shot out, and a loud boom.

"An explosion!" yelled Sammy.

"They're shooting at us!" cried Bob.

"Come on—get out of here!" gasped Frank, as they made their way through the blinding and choking vapor to where they imagined the secret door to be.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRANGE HERMIT

"COME on, fellows, this way!"

"No, over this way!"

"I tell you the door's here!"

Thus cried Bob, Sammy and Frank as they stumpled about in the mysterious smoke-filled room. They banged into the bed, tripped over chairs, and slammed into the table.

"Look out, don't go near those things again!" warned Sammy.

"We won't—if we know it!" panted Frank. "Where is that door?"

"Maybe—maybe the explosion slid it shut!" cried Bob.

This thought caused terror in the hearts of the boys until Sammy with a joyful cry, shouted:

"It's all right! Here's the door still open! Come on!"

Out they rushed, following Sammy's lead, for the smoke had now cleared away enough for them to see in the dim room.

They never paused to take away the piece of broken shutter that held open the secret sliding door, or panel in the wall. They had no desire, now, to leave things as they had found them, in hopes that the mysterious person, or persons, who used the strange room, would come back, unsuspecting, and be caught. All the boys cared about now was to get away.

Down the attic stairs they rushed, and they never paused until they were safely out of the old house. Then, some distance off, the fright left them, and they halted to look back.



There was a blinding flash.



"What happened?" panted Sammy.

"It was an explosion," decided Frank.

"No, those counterfeiters must have come back and shot at us," gasped Bob.

"Go on! You're worse than Sammy," said Frank, who was more calm than his chums. "It was some sort of explosion. Maybe it was powder the men left there, or it might have been some of the chemicals they use, in whatever they do, whether it's making bad money, or something else. Anyhow it was just an explosion. There was no one in that room but ourselves."

"Well, I guess that's right," agreed Bob, when he had thought it over a bit. "But who exploded it?"

"Maybe I did," admitted Sammy, slowly. "I know just before that flash and puff came, I touched one of the wires on those telescope things. There was a click, and it went off—all at once!"

"I should say it did," spoke Frank. "It went off fast enough."

"And there was an awful lot of smoke!" added Bob.

"Well, I'm glad we're out of the place," said Sammy. "Come on, now, it's getting late, and Mr. Jessup may be worried about us. We'd better go tell him about what we found."

"And then get the police after those counterfeiters," said Bob. "They had no right to explode stuff at us that way."

"Well, they may claim we had no right to go in their room," went on Frank, "but I guess they won't—that is if we get them. Well, come on."

"I'll tell you what let's do," proposed Sammy. "Let's see if we can locate the windows of that room from the outside. We might want to point out to Mr. Jessup where they are."

"That's a good idea," agreed Frank.

But it could not be done, for the boys found it impossible to get through the thick underbrush on that side of the old mansion. They might have managed it in broad daylight, but it was now getting dark, and they did not want to take any chances.

"The best thing we can do," said Sammy, "is to go to Mr. Jessup right away, and tell him about what happened. He'll know what's best to do."

To this Frank and Bob had no objection, and with a last look at the queer old house, the boys found the trail leading to Camp Mystery, and hurried along it.

On the way they talked over what they had seen and what had happened to them. Try as they might, they could not explain it. Sammy was sure they had discovered a counterfeiters' den, but neither Frank nor Bob would admit that this was positively so, though they agreed that it all looked very strange.

Frank did not say so, but he kept thinking that so many queer things which Sammy had discovered had turned out to be only commonplace after all, that now he feared this one would, also. Still he had to admit that the finding of the secret room was rather strange.

"There's the cabin!" exclaimed Sammy, as they came in sight of it.

"Yes, and there's Maybe, the dog, but I don't see any signs of Mr. Jessup," spoke Bob.

"I guess he's inside, getting supper," suggested Frank. "I hope he is—I'm as hungry as one of the bears that used to live on Pine Island."

"So am I," admitted Bob. "I'd like some nice hot pancakes, the kind Mr. Jessup makes, and some of his baked potatoes."

"Don't talk about it—I'm so hungry!" laughed Frank.

They kept on toward the cabin. Maybe rushed out to meet them, barking and wagging his tail, to show how glad he was to see them. But Mr. Jessup did not appear.

Somehow a sense of fear came over the boys. They did not know why, but the strange experience they had just gone through had made them nervous, and not seeing Mr. Jessup at once, added to their fears.

"I wonder where he can be?" asked Sammy, looking around the cabin. There was no sign of their friend.

"Maybe he's off hunting," suggested Frank.

"Why, he just came back from a trip," spoke Bob. "I guess you forgot that."

"I sure did," admitted Frank. "But so many things have happened in the last hour that it's no wonder. There's the game he shot," and he pointed to the rabbits and the birds.

"Yes, and there's a note on them!" cried Sammy. "Fellows, it's for us. Look it's addressed to the 'Fairview Boys.' I'll read it."

Which he did quickly enough. The note said:

"Dear Boys: I have been called over to the mainland to see my sister. She was taken suddenly ill. I will be back before long. Don't worry, and get the best supper you can. I know you can cook it.

PETER JESSUP."

For a moment the boys felt much disappointed, and not a little alarmed. Then their spirits rose.

"Well, it's too bad Mrs. Blake is sick," said Sammy, slowly, "but I guess we can manage without Mr. Jessup. We sure can get up a good meal. There's plenty of stuff."

"And we'll have roast pheasant and stewed rabbit!" cried Bob, who was fond of eating.

"No, we'd better leave them until Mr. Jessup gets back,"

suggested Frank. "I don't believe he'd like us to touch his game. He'll probably be back before it gets very late."

"And maybe he'll be hungry too," said Bob. "We'll cook enough to save him some."

"Then let's get right at it!" suggested Sammy. "Those counterfeiterers will have to wait," and he laughed. All the boys were feeling better now, especially since they were in their own camp. And if Mr. Jessup was not there, they had good old dog Maybe, who frisked about, glad of the company of the boys. It must have been hard for him to stay behind when his master left.

Sammy and his chums were soon busy over the meal. They had been camping before, several times, and were getting to be quite expert. One made the fire, another got the meat and potatoes ready, while Frank opened a can of baked beans to warm in a frying pan over the stove, the fire being made there instead of outside, though later the boys intended to kindle a camp blaze in front of the cabin.

"Well, this is something like!" exclaimed Sammy, as they sat about the table, after supper, the lamp glowing on their shining faces.

"That's right!" said Frank.

"It's nice and cozy in here," agreed Bob.

They had kindled a fire outside, and sat about that for a while, waiting for the sound of Mr. Jessup's return. Then as it grew later, and colder, they went inside.

"He may not come until nearly midnight," said Sammy.

"Oh, well, we won't sit up for him," suggested Frank. "I'm tired and sleepy. I'm going to turn in soon. Maybe will stand guard for us, won't you old fellow?"

The dog barked his answer.

A fire was kindled on the hearth, and the boys sat about this for a while, talking over what had occurred since their arrival

at Camp Mystery. Then, as they were very sleepy, they locked up, leaving Maybe stretched out before the glowing fire, and turned into the bunks.

Contrary to their expectations, nothing happened all night. In fact they did not wake up until morning, when the sun was streaming into the cabin. Then Sammy jumped up, looked at the clock, and cried:

"After eight; and Mr. Jessup isn't home yet!"

"Maybe his sister is worse," suggested Frank. "Let's get breakfast, and then we can decide on what to do."

They made a good meal, and then, after talking matters over, they made up their minds that the best thing to do would be to take a walk about the island. If they saw no signs of Mr. Jessup by noon, they planned to go over to the mainland, and perhaps give up their camp at Mystery, to go home.

"For, though we'd like to stay here alone, first rate," said Sammy, "our folks might not like it, or think it safe. They let us come because they thought Mr. Jessup was going to be with us, and if he isn't, we ought to go home."

"I s'pose so," sighed Bob, "but it's mighty jolly here."

"Even with the old hermit, and the counterfeitters," spoke Frank.

"Oh, the old hermit never will bother us," declared Sammy. "And maybe the counterfeitters have been gone a long time."

"And maybe Mr. Jessup will send someone to stay with us, if he can't come back himself," went on Bob. "Then we could stay all right."

"Say, that would be fine!" cried Frank. "It may happen, too. We'll wait a bit about going back."

They decided this would be a fair thing to do, and, after putting the cabin to rights, after their morning meal, and planning what they would have for dinner, they set out for a tramp about the island, ~~Maybe the dog going with them.~~

They went on for half a mile, when Bob, who was in the lead, suddenly stopped, and called out:

"There's somebody moving over there!"

"Over where?" asked Sammy.

"There," answered Bob, pointing to a clump of trees, at the foot of which was a bank of snow. "I just saw a man."

"Maybe it's Mr. Jessup," spoke Frank.

"I hope so," murmured Sammy. "I'd like to get after those men who live in the secret room."

And then, as the boys watched, the figure of an old man came out from a clump of bushes. The man had a long white beard, and white hair, and as he came into a little opening he looked in the direction of the boys.

"The old hermit!" whispered Frank. "There he is!"

And, as the boys looked, the aged man, about whom there seemed to be such a mystery, shook his fist at them, and then disappeared behind a clump of bushes.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE DRIFT

"THAT sure was him!"

"Yes, he's the old hermit!"

"I wonder what he's up to now?"

In turn Sammy, Bob and Frank spoke, as they looked toward the place where the aged man had disappeared. They could still see the bushes shaking as he forced his way through them.

"I wish it had been Mr. Jessup," said Sammy, and he could not help sighing a bit.

"Yes, we need him," added Bob. "But we'll do the best we can. If he doesn't come by night, I s'pose we'll have to go back home."

"And I sure will hate to do that," put in Sammy Brown. "Maybe there'll be a way out."

For a moment the boys looked at one another, and then at the spot where the hermit had vanished. Maybe barked once or twice, and then began running about, as he had been doing ever since he came out with the boys, hoping perhaps to scare up a rabbit.

Sammy was doing some hard thinking. His eyes blinked fast, as they always did when he had several ideas going through his mind at the same time. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Fellows, are you with me?"

"With you? In doing what?" asked Frank.

"In following that old hermit?" I want to see where he goes."

Neither Bob nor Frank answered for a moment.

"Well, he's probably going to his cabin, or cave, or whatever he lives in," Bob finally said: "We know about where it is, and I don't see any good in following him. He might get mad at us."

"He probably would," said Sammy. "But getting mad wouldn't hurt us. I'd like to see where he goes."

"Why?" asked Bob.

"I have a certain reason," went on Sammy. "Do you know, fellows, the hermit may be the—counterfeiter!"

"What!" cried Bob.

"Do you mean that?" inquired Frank.

"Well, I'm not sure, of course," went on Sammy. "But he might be, you know."

"Yes, of course," laughed Frank, "and the time we thought we had struck a bear here, it might have been one, only—it wasn't!"

"Oh, well, of course anyone can make a mistake," said Sammy. "And I'm not saying I'm right. Only it's worth trying; isn't it?"

"Well, maybe so," replied Frank, slowly.

"All I want to do," went on Sammy, "is to follow the old hermit, and see what he does. If he goes toward the place where we found the secret room, and the queer things, we'll know he has something to do with them."

"Maybe," put in Frank, with a laugh. He did not always agree with Sammy.

"Oh, of course, I'm not saying for sure," went on the other. "But will you come?"

"I don't mind," spoke Frank, after a few moments' thought. "But we'd better not go too close."

"That's what I say," added Bob. "He might try to harm us."

"We've got Maybe with us," said Sammy, boldly. "I'm not afraid."

And so the boys decided on Sammy's plan, little thinking what would come of it.

They could no longer see the hermit, but they thought they could trace which way he went by following the tracks in the snow.

"Besides, we have the dog with us," added Sammy, "and he can follow. He can track the hermit just like he does a rabbit."

The boys went on cautiously. They did not want to get too close to Mr. Addison, who, though he was an old man, might be one who was very easily made angry, and who might work some harm to them. In fact they already knew that he lost his temper easily.

For perhaps half a mile they followed the tracks of the aged man through the snow. This was easy to do since he tramped over a place where the white crust was unbroken by other footsteps. The dog, too, led them by sniffing at the trail on the ground. But they had had no sight of Mr. Addison since he had disappeared into the bushes after shaking his fist at them.

"He isn't going toward the old house," said Sammy, after a bit.

"No, he's heading in the wrong direction for that," added Frank. "Maybe he's going to his own cabin."

"If he does," spoke Sammy, "we won't follow him there."

The boys were now some distance away from Camp Mystery. They had occasional glimpses of the frozen lake, but they had not seen any figure bearing a likeness to Mr. Jessup, skating over it. The hunter was probably still with his sick sister, they thought, and they did not quite know what to do.

"Look out for yourselves here, fellows," said Sammy, as they came out into an opening in the woods.

"What's the matter—did you see the hermit?" asked Frank.

"No, but there's a big cliff here, and we might slip over."

"Let's have a look," suggested Bob, pressing forward with Frank to where Sammy stood on the edge of a cliff which was about ten feet high, going down steeply into a little valley.

Suddenly, as the boys were looking over into a big drift of snow below them, they heard a noise behind them. There was a rush of feet, and Maybe, the dog, barked furiously. Then the harsh voice of the hermit cried:

"Follow me, will you? I'll teach you to do that! You'll be sorry you ever tried to find out my secret!"

Before the boys could defend themselves, or make a stand, the furious old man rushed at them. With extended hands he pushed Bob over the cliff into the deep bank of snow below.

"Look out!" yelled Frank, as he saw his chum disappear.

"Hey! What are you doing that for?" demanded Sammy.

"I'll show you! I'll teach you to follow me!" snarled the old hermit. "Down you go! All of you!"

He pushed Frank over the cliff also, the boy struggling to keep his balance. But over he went, head first.

"Don't you dare touch me!" cried Sammy, getting ready to defend himself. Yet he knew he could do nothing against the angry hermit.

"I'll fix you!" cried the old man.

"You let me alone!" pleaded Sammy. "Sic him, Maybe!" he cried, to the dog.

Indeed the hunter's dog needed no urging. At the first sign of the old man Maybe had rushed at him. Now he was tugging at his coat-tails as though to stop him from pushing the boys over the cliff. But the man was strong, and paid no



He pushed Frank over the cliff also.

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attention to the dog, dragging him along over the slippery snow.

"There you go!" cried Mr. Addison, and with that he shoved Sammy down into the big snowdrift.

"There!" muttered the hermit, with a hard smile on his wrinkled face. "Now I guess them boys won't find out my secret!"

And he walked away into the woods, the dog barking after him.

As for the Fairview boys, they were more frightened than hurt. True, they had been pushed down some distance, but they fell into a soft bank of snow, and, except that it got down their necks, and up their sleeves, as well as into their boots, they were in no danger. It was like falling into a feather bed.

"Whew! What happened?" gasped Bob, floundering about.

"I guess we happened—or it happened to us!" said Frank. "Where's Sammy?"

"Here I am," cried that small hero. "He pushed me, too."

"Say, he ought to be arrested!" exclaimed Bob, angrily, as he flopped about in the snow. "What did he do it for?"

"Said we were following him," answered Frank, as he wiped the snow out of his face.

"Well, I guess we were, all right," admitted Sammy. "But he had no right to be so mean."

"Where did he go?" Frank wanted to know.

"I—I didn't stop to look," admitted Sammy. "It all happened too quick for me."

"Same here," laughed Bob. "Now I wonder if we can get out of here?"

It was not as easy as it seemed at first, for the little valley into which the boys had been pushed by the angry hermit was filled with snow, and they sank in it above their waists.

But they floundered on, and were slowly making their way out. They were getting quite tired, however, and might have sunk down in the snow, and have taken severe colds, had their struggle lasted too long.

Suddenly Bob cried out.

"Hark!" he called.

"It's a dog barking," said Sammy.

"Yes, and it sounds like Maybe," added Frank.

"See, there he is!" cried Sammy, "and he's got someone with him!"

"It's Mr. Jessup! Hurray, now we're all right!" yelled Bob, with delight. "Now we'll show that hermit what's what!"

CHAPTER XIII

HELPING THE HERMIT

MR. JESSUP, with his dog floundering in the snow ahead of him, came toward the boys, who were still stuck in the snowbank, though slowly getting out of it.

"What's the matter?" cried the hunter. "What happened to you? You ought not to go in a place like that!"

"We couldn't help it!" exclaimed Sammy, with a laugh. "We were pushed in!"

"Pushed in?" exclaimed Mr. Jessup. "What in the world do you mean, Sammy?"

"Help us out, and we'll tell you," suggested Frank. "We're tired out trying to wade through the deep snow."

"I guess that's right," admitted Mr. Jessup. "I had better be helping you instead of talking. Come on, Maybe!"

With big strides the hunter came on. To him the drift gave little trouble, though for the small boys it was all they could do to wade through. But now they had help.

Mr. Jessup had a pair of snow-shoes strapped to his back, though the crust was not thick enough to allow him to use them. They would come in useful as snow shovels, though, and he at once took them for that purpose.

"Here you go!" he cried to Bob, who was nearest him. "Catch one of these shoes and help dig a path. I'll dig one to meet with yours, and when you get out here, where the snow isn't so deep, you'll be all right."

"Hurrah!" cried Sammy, glad that everything was more pleasant now.

"Is your sister better?" asked Frank, while Bob used the snow-shoe as a shovel, the hunter doing the same with the one he had.

"Yes, much better," was the answer. "I was sorry I had to stay away all night, and I kept thinking, up to the last minute, that I could get off and come back to you. That's why I didn't send anyone to keep you company.

"And finally, when my sister was well enough for me to leave her in the care of some neighbors, it was too late to start for Pine Island. But I made up my mind that you boys would be all right, and I didn't worry. You were all right, weren't you, except for what happened to you just now?"

"Yes," said Sammy, eager to tell the story of the mysterious hidden room, and the strange things in it, "yes, we're all right. Nothing happened during the night, and we got along fine. Maybe was good company."

"I thought he'd be, and that's why I made him stay when I was called away," said the hunter. "But he did want to come with me."

While the boys and Mr. Jessup were talking he and Bob used the snow-shoes as shovels, so that, in a few minutes, the boys were out of the drift, and on level ground where the snow was only up to their knees.

"Now then," said Mr. Jessup, with a grin, as he looked at them, "I'm ready to hear your story. How did it all happen, and who pushed you into the drift?"

"The hermit!" cried the three boys at once.

"What! You don't mean Mr. Addison?" asked the hunter, in surprise.

"That's who it was," said Frank.

"Well, why did he do such a thing as that?" asked Mr. Jessup, in surprise. "I've known him for sometime, and, except that he was a bit odd now and then, he never acted that

way. I always thought him quite gentle, except that he would order people away from his cabin. Did you do anything to him?"

For a moment the boys did not answer, and then Sammy, knowing that it was best to tell everything, said:

"Well, we followed him, that was all. We wanted to see if he was going to the big house."

"You followed him; that was all?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did he do?"

"Well, he got out of sight, and we were trailing him," explained Bob. "Then we came to that cliff and we were looking over, down into the pile of snow, when, all of a sudden——"

"He rushed out on us from the bushes," continued Frank, and he——"

"Pushed us down, one after the other," said Sammy, taking up the story. "And he said he'd teach us to follow him and try to find out his secret."

"Hum, he said that; did he?" mused Mr. Jessup. "Well, I'm afraid he must be out of his mind. I've been thinking that for some time, and now I'm sure of it. He must be crazy, or he wouldn't do such a thing as that. He must have been quite angry at you, and it's lucky he did nothing worse than shove you into a snowbank."

"Now I advise you boys not to go near him again. If you see him as you walk about the island, don't notice or speak to him. That will be the safest way. So you followed him, and he thought you were after his secret; eh? He hasn't any secret, as far as I know. Poor old man, he certainly must be crazy. I'm sorry for him. But, boys, did you have any special object in following him?"

Again the three chums looked one at the other.

"You'd better tell, Sammy," said Frank, at last, "you made the find, you know."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Jessup, in some surprise. "Have you boys a secret, too?" and he looked curiously at them, while Maybe frisked about, barking and unable to understand why his master would not take after a rabbit he had driven from its burrow.

"Yes, we did find something strange in the old house," said Sammy. "We discovered a secret room, and in it is an outfit of counterfeiters, Mr. Jessup!"

"And they shot at us!" cried Bob.

"And you ought to have seen the smoke!" added Frank.

The hunter looked from one to another of the boys, as if unable to understand what they were saying. He might have thought they were playing a joke on him, but their faces were too serious for that.

"Secret room!" he murmured. "Counterfeiters! They shot at you!"

"Yes, and we thought the hermit might be the counterfeiter, so we were following him to see if he went to the old house," said Bob.

"Whew! This is getting worse and worse!" exclaimed the hunter. "I guess you'd better begin at the beginning, boys, and tell me all there is to tell. Old Mr. Addison a counterfeiter! I can't believe it."

"This is the way it was," began Sammy, and then he told of the exploration of the old house, after the hunt of the day before, and how, most unexpectedly, he had pressed on the spring that opened the panel or door of the secret room.

"And you should see the things in it!" put in Bob, as by turns the boys described the queer instruments.

"And then that flash and boom!" cried Frank. "It was terrible!"

"It must have been," admitted the hunter. "But I own up that I am puzzled. I never knew there was a secret room in the old house, and I thought I'd been all over it. As for those things you tell about—well, I guess I'll have to look at 'em myself."

Mr. Jessup did not say so, but the truth of the matter was that the boys had talked so fast and so excitedly, and had interrupted each other so often, that they had not given a very clear account of the things they had seen. Then, too, as is the case not only with boys, but with grown-ups, no one ever sees the same thing the way another person would.

The boys gave as good descriptions as they could of the queer objects in the secret room, but each one put in something a little different, until it was no wonder that Mr. Jessup was puzzled.

"Now I'll tell you what," he said. "We'll go back to Camp Mystery and figure this thing out. I guess I didn't name it out of the way when I called it 'Mystery,' for it's more mysterious than ever now.

"But we'll get to the bottom of it sooner or later. I'll have a look at the things in that room. Maybe I can find out who has been taking my grub. You weren't troubled while I was away last night! were you?"

"No," answered Sammy, "nothing happened. We slept fine."

"I thought you would be all right," went on the hunter. "I came skating over to the island a little while ago, and went right to my cabin. You weren't there, but pretty soon in came Maybe, and he acted so strange that I was afraid something had happened to you. He pulled at my coat, and would run on a little way, and then stop and bark, just as if he was telling me to follow him, and he really was, as it happened."

"He must have gone for help for us!" cried Frank.

"That's what he did," replied the hunter. "He led me right here, and I can tell you I was a bit scared when I saw you floundering in the snow. I'm glad you're all right."

"Sure we're all right!" cried Sammy, "and I'd like to go to the old house right away, and find out what all those things mean. If that is a counterfeiting den we can have the men arrested; can't we?" he asked.

Mr. Jessup laughed.

"Well, Sammy," he said, "of course if there are counterfeiters here they ought to be taken in, I s'pose. But I never heard of any, and there's been no bad money circulating around Pine Island or Fairview, as far as I know."

"I told him they weren't counterfeiting things," said Frank.

"You just wait!" exclaimed Sammy, mysteriously. He was sure his find was going to turn out big this time.

"Well, we'd better get back to the cabin and prepare to look into this thing," suggested the hunter. "I want to think it over a bit. By the way, was there any sign of anybody having been in that room lately?"

"You couldn't tell—the bed looked as if it had been slept in," said Bob. "But there must have been someone hiding there, or else how could he have shot at us?"

Mr. Jessup shook his head.

"I'll admit it's a puzzle, so far," he said. "But after I see it I may be able to explain it all. Come along."

They headed back for the cabin, the boys talking on the way of the many things that had happened since coming to Pine Island. Mr. Jessup said he had heard no special news in Fairview. He had not sent any word to the parents of the three chums, fearing they would worry about the boys staying alone all night.

"And it turned out better that I did not," he said.

They were nearing the cabin of Camp Mystery, and Mr.

Jessup was pointing out to the boys a trail that led from his place to the cabin of the hermit.

"But I wouldn't advise you to follow that trail after dark, unless you know it pretty well," he said.

"Why not?" asked Bob, always looking for reasons.

"Because that bog, that I told you about, is on both sides of the trail at certain places, and it's dangerous. I often wonder why old Mr. Addison built his cabin so near the bog. It's true there are some good springs of water near it, but I'd rather be on higher ground, and carry my water a way. So don't travel that trail except in daylight, boys."

They promised to be careful, and walked on, looking curiously back toward the dangerous bog.

Suddenly Frank, who was in the lead, raised a hand to order a halt and silence.

"What's up?" asked Sammy.

"Listen!" said Frank.

All heard a deep groan.

"Someone's there!" exclaimed Bob, pointing to a clump of bushes just ahead, and to one side of the trail.

"Maybe it's a—bear!" faltered Sammy.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Jessup. "That's a human voice. Hello, there!" he cried. "Who are you? What do you want? Has anything happened? Answer!"

"Maybe it's the counterfeiters," whispered Sammy.

The dog was barking excitedly.

"Come here!" commanded Mr. Jessup, and then, as the groan sounded again, he went forward. Parting the bushes he looked ahead and cried out:

"Boys, it's Mr. Addison—the hermit, and he seems to have fallen and hurt himself! Come here and we'll help him!"

The three rushed forward. There on the ground, under the bushes, where there was no snow, lay the old man. He seemed

to be unconscious and it was his queer breathing that made the groaning sound.

"Boys, see if you can't get him out of there, into a more comfortable place," said Mr. Jessup. "I'll run to the cabin for a folding stretcher I have, and I'll also get some medicine. See if you can get him out. I'll be back in a few minutes."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BOILING SPRING

MR. ADDISON was a full-grown man, but he was quite old, and not very heavy. In fact he was so light that the three sturdy boy chums easily carried him out from under the bushes to a cleared place along the path. The hermit only moaned as he was moved, and remained unconscious.

"Let us take off our coats, fellows," suggested Sammy. "We'll spread them out on the snow, and make a bed for him."

The day was quite warm, so the boys would not be likely to take cold from removing their coats, and soon they had made a more comfortable place for the aged man than the bare ground on which he had fallen.

"I wonder what could have happened to him?" said Bob.

"He must have fallen, and hurt himself," spoke Frank. "But neither his arms or legs are broken, as far as I can tell."

"I guess it's his head," remarked Sammy. "Probably that's what makes him senseless. I wish Mr. Jessup would hurry back."

"And to think that a little while ago he pushed us into a snowbank!" murmured Bob. "He couldn't do it now."

"No," said Sammy, softly. "Poor old man! I guess he's had lots of trouble."

Indeed, as the aged hermit lay there on the boys' coats, which they had partly folded over him, his face showed many wrinkles of care and suffering, as well as of age. Truly

he did not seem to have had a very happy life, and in their hearts the boys easily forgave him for what he had done to them.

"Here I am!" exclaimed Mr. Jessup, as, followed by his dog, he came up the path. Over his shoulder he carried a folding stretcher, consisting of two poles with a broad canvass piece in between. On this the hermit could be placed, and, by means of the handles, he could be easily carried.

"I'll give him a little spirits of ammonia first," said the hunter. "That is good when a person has fainted. Then we can decide what next to do. It may be that we'll need a doctor."

He mixed some of the ammonia in a glass, with a little water, and managed to get some between the lips of the old hermit. But it did little good. The aged man only moaned feebly and did not open his eyes.

"I guess we'd better carry him to his cabin," said Mr. Jessup, after a few minutes. "It's farther than it is to Camp Mystery, but if he wakes up, and sees himself in a strange place, it may have a bad effect on him. We can easily carry him to his own cabin."

This they did, the hunter taking one end of the stretcher, and two boys taking turns at the other end. In this way they were soon at the place where the hermit lived.

The cabin was rough enough on the outside, but the interior was clean, and nicely arranged. The poor old man lived very simply. He was placed on his bunk, and then Mr. Jessup, who knew a little about medicine, tried to bring him to his senses.

It seemed to be of no use, however, and finally the hunter said:

"Boys, I think I'd better skate over to the mainland, and bring back a doctor. I wouldn't like poor Mr. Addison to die.



The kettle was put on.

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You're not afraid to stay here with him; are you? I'll leave Maybe with you."

"Afraid? Of course not!" cried Sammy. It was broad daylight. Why should they be afraid?

True, the mysterious old mansion was not far away, and the strange things in the secret room had not been explained. But the boys made up their minds they would not be alarmed.

"I'll come back as soon as I can," said Mr. Jessup. "If he wakes up you might give him a drink of water. Or you could make coffee. You know how, and I see he has the things here. Yes, a good strong cup of coffee might help him. Now don't worry. Maybe, you're to stay with the boys."

The dog whined, and evidently wanted to go with his master, but he obeyed well, and, with a bark of protest, he lay down on the cabin floor.

Mr. Jessup, who had his skates with him, started for the lake, intending to skate to the mainland after a physician. He could come back with the doctor in a cutter, for the ice was thick enough to bear the weight of a horse.

Left to themselves, the boys sat in the cabin with the old, unconscious man. He breathed heavily but did not open his eyes. Once in a while he groaned.

"I wonder if we hadn't better make the coffee," suggested Bob, after a bit. "If he could take some of that he might feel much better."

"Good idea," said Sammy. "Let's start a fire. It's cold in here, anyhow."

There was a stove and an open fireplace, the latter in the other room of the cabin. Some logs were set aglow on the hearth, and a roaring blaze kindled in the stove. The kettle was put on, and soon a fragrant pot of coffee was ready.

The boys were talking over whether they had better not try to get some of the hot beverage between the set lips of the

aged man, when there came a sudden knock on the cabin door.

"Who's that?" whispered Frank, startled.

"It can't be Mr. Jessup, back already," remarked Bob.

"No, he'd walk right in," said Sammy.

The knock was repeated.

"See who it is," spoke Bob.

"I'll go," said Sammy, and he went to the door.

He saw a young man standing there—a young man he had never seen before, as far as he knew. The stranger's face was a pleasant one, and he smiled at the boy.

"Well," said the visitor, "I don't know you, and it's rather odd to see Mr. Addison having company. Is he in?"

"Yes," said Sammy, "but he's hurt." He noticed that the caller had a pair of skates in his hand, showing how he had reached the island.

"Hurt!" exclaimed the young man. "And just when I come to bring him good news! Let me see him, please."

He quickly entered the cabin, and bent over the form of the hermit on the bunk. The boys looked on in wonder. Who could this stranger be?

The young man seemed to know something about the duties of a doctor, for he rapidly felt about the aged man, for signs of broken bones, and then, finding none, passed his hand over the sufferer's head.

"Ah, there's the trouble," he said. "He's had a bad knock there, but it doesn't seem to be serious. I think he'll soon come around. You have coffee?" and he sniffed the air.

"Good and hot!" answered Sammy.

"Let me have some," suggested the young man, and some was given him in a cup. Holding the aged man up in one arm, the young man managed to get some of the hot coffee down his throat. It did good at once, for Mr. Addison opened

his eyes, looked strangely about him, gazed in seeming wonder at the boys, and then looked at the young man who was supporting him.

"It's all right, Uncle Frank," said the stranger. "You're all right. You had a little fall, and these boys must have brought you here. But you're not hurt to speak of, and I bring you good news."

"Good—good news," faltered the old man. "You bring me good news, Ed?"

"Yes, the very best. The land is now yours. I have here all the papers. You don't need to live here any longer to claim it. You can come home with me. I have the deeds to the land."

"And the spring—the boiling spring—is the medical spring mine?" gasped Mr. Addison. He seemed to be getting better very quickly.

"The boiling spring is yours," the young man assured him. "Now take it easy—everything is all right."

"Oh, I am so glad—so glad!" murmured the old man, sinking back on the bunk. "Now I won't have to worry about anyone taking my secret away from me. Oh, everything is all right now," and he sighed in contentment.

"Take a little more coffee," urged the young man whom the hermit had called Ed. "It will do you good."

It really seemed to, for soon the aged man was able to sit up again.

He looked at the boys strangely, and they did not know what to do or say. They wondered if the hermit would try to drive them away.

"Are—are you the boys I pushed over the cliff?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Sammy, and he wondered how the old man could explain his queer action.

"Well, I—I'm sorry I did it," went on the hermit. "You

see I was a bit excited. I thought you were following me, trying to steal my secret. But you can't get it now. I own the land. You have the papers—the deed, Ed?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, Uncle Frank, here they are," and the stranger gave a bundle of documents to the old man, who eagerly looked them over.

"Yes—yes," he said. "It's all right. I have a clear title to the boiling spring. And now I'll explain. But in the first place, how did I get here? I seem to remember falling down——"

He paused for an answer.

"You did fall," said Sammy. "Mr. Jessup and we boys found you under the bushes, and we carried you here. He has gone for the doctor."

"Hum, yes. That's very good of him—and you, especially after the way I treated you. But I hardly knew what I was doing. But I don't believe I need a doctor. I'm all right."

He really seemed so, and was able now to walk slowly about the cabin.

"I remember what happened," he went on. "I was going down to the shore to see if you were coming, Ed, for you had promised to be here to-day, when I slipped and fell. I must have struck my head on a stone, for it all got dark, and I didn't remember anything else until I saw you giving me coffee. All the rest is a blank."

"Well, you're all right now, Uncle Frank," was the answer. "I suppose I'd better tell you who I am," the newcomer went on to the boys. "My name is Edward Houghton, and Mr. Addison is my uncle. I have been doing some legal business for him for some time, and now it is all finished."

"And the medical boiling spring is my property!" cried the hermit.

"Yes, it is your property," said his nephew.

"And you and I will get rich!" the old man cried, enthusiastically.

"I hope so," spoke Mr. Houghton. "You certainly have suffered very much to get your rights. But it is all over now."

The boys were quite puzzled by this talk, but it was soon to be explained. There was the jingle of sleigh bells from the direction of the lake, and soon was heard the approach of footsteps.

"It's Mr. Jessup!" cried Sammy. And so it proved. He had brought the doctor back with him in a cutter.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Jessup," said the old hermit, "but I don't believe I need the doctor's services."

"However, as long as he's here, better let him look you over," suggested Mr. Houghton.

The medical man said, beyond a hard blow on the head, which had made him unconscious for a time, Mr. Addison was not hurt.

"I'd stand another blow on the head for the sake of my fine spring," said the hermit, and he laughed.

He really seemed quite a different man now. His face was kinder, and the boys were no longer afraid of him.

"I guess you'll have to explain," suggested Mr. Jessup. "What is it all about, and what do you mean by your boiling spring, Mr. Addison?"

"Come with me, and I'll show you," said the hermit.

With slow steps he led the way to a little glade, not far from his cabin. There the boys saw a strange sight. In spite of the fact that it was Winter, and that snow was on the ground, there was a spot of green grass and ferns to be seen, surrounding a boiling and bubbling spring of clear water. And from the water a little cloud of steam arose.

"There she is!" cried Mr. Addison. "There's my boiling spring, and the waters of it are the best thing in the world for

rheumatism. I know, for I've cured myself, and cured others. I discovered the spring by accident, and I worked hard to get title to the land it's on. Now I have it, and I'm going to bottle those waters and sell 'em. I'm going to be rich! I'm not going to be a hermit any longer," and he seemed ten years younger.

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF CAMP MYSTERY

"WELL," said Mr. Jessup slowly, "this may be all clear to you and your nephew, Mr. Addison, but it's like Greek to me. If you wouldn't mind explaining——"

"Of course I'll explain," said Mr. Addison eagerly. Sammy hoped something would be said to clear up the mystery of the strange room in the old mansion.

"First of all," said the hermit, "I want to tell you boys how sorry I am that I pushed you into the snow. I was all excited when I saw you following me, and I really didn't know what I was doing. You see I had been expecting my nephew for some time, and when he didn't come I was afraid something had happened so that I couldn't get the spring I had tried so hard for. So first I want to beg your pardon."

"Oh, that's all right," said Sammy, easily. "It was as much our fault as it was yours. We had no right to follow you, and really we weren't hurt a bit."

"I'm glad of it," said the old man. "Well, to begin at the beginning. Some months ago, when I was walking over this island, I found this boiling spring. It was in a place few people would visit, and I guess that's why it was never talked of before. For a good many years I have had the rheumatism, and I've tried all sorts of cures. Just by accident I thought of trying this spring water, as I could easily tell that it had some sort of medicine in it.

"I took some home, and in a few days after taking it I felt

better. Then I made more tests, and I was sure I had found a cure for some of the worst kinds of rheumatism. Then I decided to try to get possession of the land on which the spring was.

"This was not easy, as the title was in dispute. But I got my nephew to help me. In order that no one else would claim the spring, I decided to put up a cabin near it, and live on the land until I could buy it. This I did, and I became a sort of hermit. I was so afraid someone would discover the secret of the spring that I drove away anyone who came near. In that way I suppose folks began to think I was crazy, and a sort of crank.

"But I did not care. I wanted to get title to that spring, for I knew I could sell the waters and get rich. And now I can. My nephew has brought me the final papers, and the spring is mine. I am going to form a company, and bottle the boiling water. Of course it won't stay hot, but it will be just as good, for it can be heated before being swallowed.

"So I'm no longer the hermit of Pine Island. I'm going back where I belong, and I'll let others do the work. And I'll say this, Mr. Jessup, if ever you get the rheumatism you can have free all the water from my mineral spring that you want."

"Thank you!" said Mr. Jessup, with a laugh, "but I hope I'll never have the rheumatism. But if I do I'll use your spring water."

"I had a hard time getting the final papers," said Mr. Houghton, "and that's what took me so long. But now, Uncle, the boiling spring is yours, and you needn't worry any more."

"How can it be hot water in the Winter time?" asked Bob.

"Well, that's one of the mysteries of Nature," said the former hermit. "I suppose the waters must come from deep

down in the earth, and the wise men tell us that inside the earth are raging fires. I don't know about that, but I do know my medical spring will cure rheumatism. And I guess now, everything is explained."

"No, not everything," said Sammy quickly.

"Eh?" asked the old man.

"We found a secret room in the old mansion," went on Sammy, "and it's a counterfeiter's den, I'm sure. We thought you were going there, Mr. Addison, that's why we followed you.

"And while we were in there," Sammy went on, "there was an explosion. We thought someone was shooting at us, and we ran out. That has to be explained yet."

"That's so!" exclaimed Mr. Jessup. "I've got to look into that."

Mr. Houghton laughed.

"It won't take much of an explanation to do away with that mystery," he said. "If you'll come with me I'll show you all about it. I fancy you stumbled across one of my fads. Will you come, Uncle Frank?"

"No, I'll go back to my cabin," was the hermit's answer. "I'm going to pack up and go back to the mainland to live, now that my medical spring is safe."

"Then the rest of us will go," suggested the young man.

They left the little glade where the hot spring made grass grow in the middle of Winter, and soon reached the hermit's cabin again. He went in there, while Sammy and his chums, with Mr. Jessup and Mr. Houghton, kept on to the deserted mansion, telling the hermit they would soon be back to look after him. The doctor, whom Mr. Jessup had brought, had gone back to the mainland in his cutter.

"Shall we go right in?" asked Sammy, when Mr. Hough-

ton and the others reached the old house, and prepared to enter.

"Of course—why not?" inquired the young man, with a smile.

"Well, I was thinking that the counterfeiters——"

Mr. Houghton laughed.

"I'll explain all that," he said.

The place of the secret room was soon reached. It was just as when Sammy and his chums had rushed away from it after the explosion that had so frightened them. The sliding door was still wedged back with the piece of shutter.

Mr. Houghton went over to the table on which was piled the strange apparatus. He moved some of the wires and springs.

"Look out!" cried Sammy. "You may get shot!"

"No danger!" laughed the young man. "I fancy you boys set off the flashlight, and there isn't another."

"Flashlight!" cried Sammy.

"Yes, that was what made the smoke and explosion," said Mr. Houghton. "You touched the spring that worked the electric battery, and the current set off some flashlight powder in a box. It did make quite an explosion, I fancy."

"But what was flashlight powder doing up here?" asked Mr. Jessup.

"I was trying to get some night photographs of bats," explained Mr. Houghton. "You see all this apparatus is just some photographic cameras, set to work automatically. I fancy I have the pictures of you boys on the plate, instead of the bats," and he smiled at the three chums.

"Photographs!" cried Sammy.

"Cameras!" exclaimed Bob.

"Aren't these things telescopes?" asked Frank.

"And isn't there any counterfeiting plant?" Sammy wanted to know.

"Nothing half as sensational as that," answered Mr. Houghton, with a hearty laugh. "This is only my new apparatus for having animals take their own pictures."

For a moment there was silence, and then Sammy, in a queer sort of voice, murmured:

"Stung again!"

All his mystery had vanished into thin air.

"Make animals take their own photographs; eh?" said Mr. Jessup. "That's rather odd."

"Oh, it is often done," said Mr. Houghton. "All you have to do is to set your camera in the woods after dark, near where you have noticed marks of a raccoon, muskrat or other wild animal. You put a string across the path the animal usually takes, and in the dark it runs into the string and breaks it. This sets off a flashlight which makes the place as light as day. The breaking of the string also opens and closes the shutters of the camera, and so the animal takes its own picture. I've been doing it for some time, and had good results. I left my cameras, flashlights, batteries and so on here, in the hope of getting pictures of bats, but I guess I'll have to try again."

"So that's what it was that exploded," said Sammy—"flashlight powder?"

"That was it," said Mr. Houghton. "You see I happened to discover this secret room by accident. I was going through the old mansion one day, thinking it would be a good place to get bat pictures, and I found the secret chamber. So I fitted it up as a room where I could sleep when I had to. Often I would take my cameras out in the woods and leave them there until nearly morning. Then I would get up and go bring them in. I did not want to disturb my uncle so I

stayed here. I fancy the secret room must have been built by the man who put up the old mansion, for his own use."

"I think so," agreed Mr. Jessup. "He was a queer character anyhow. And to think I've been in and out of the old place so much, and never found the secret room!"

"It was pretty well hidden," said Mr. Houghton. "Well, I don't imagine I'll use it any more. I'll try for bat pictures somewhere else. Besides, if my uncle's mineral spring turns out as well as he thinks it will, this place may become a Summer resort, and the old mansion could be made into a hotel for people who want to take the rheumatism cure."

"But there's one thing I don't understand," said Mr. Jessup, "and that is who took my grub."

"I think I can explain that, too," spoke Mr. Houghton. "I had hired a young man to assist me, in my photographic work, but when I found out he was not honest I discharged him. I saw him come along one day with a strip of bacon, and a long pole with a hook on the end. He said he had hooked the bacon."

"And so he had!" cried Mr. Jessup. "That was one of the pieces I missed."

"The fellow must have stood some distance away from your cabin, and caught the string of the bacon in the hook on the pole," said the photographer. "That's why you never saw any footmarks."

"Then this is the end of Camp Mystery," said Sammy, faintly.

"That's right!" cried Frank. "I told you there weren't any counterfeiters."

"Well, there might have been," returned Sammy.

And he wondered why the others laughed.

But it was really the end of Camp Mystery. The hermit's secret had been the warm, medical spring, and now that he

had full title to it he need not worry any more, nor drive away those whom he thought might try to cheat him out of the property.

Mr. Houghton had explained the queer machines in the secret room, and had told how he used to photograph wild animals at night. A few days afterward he showed the boys how he set the cameras in the wood, with a string which the animals themselves would break, thus setting off the flashlight and taking their own picture.

Mr. Jessup made some inquiries, and found out that the secret room in the old mansion had been built by the former owner of it. He had no particular use for it, but it was just a notion on his part to have it made. Mr. Houghton had accidentally discovered it, just as Sammy had done.

As for the young man who had taken things from Mr. Jessup's camp, he was not heard of again. After all, he had not taken a great deal, and his plan of using a long pole with a hook on it explained why he had never left any marks. He could reach in the window or door of the cabin when Mr. Jessup was away, and get what he wanted. He had been in the habit of staying in the secret room when Mr. Houghton did not sleep there.

"Well, as long as everything is explained, we may as well go back to camp," said Sammy, when they left the old mansion.

"Yes, I guess so," agreed Mr. Jessup. "You boys are entitled to some fun after your hard work."

"Yes, and they're entitled to more than that," said Mr. Addison, a little later. "I owe them something for helping take care of me," and some time afterward, when the Mineral Spring Company was formed, he sent each of the boys a nice present.

"Well, now we'll take it easy," suggested Sammy, when

they got back to the hunter's cabin, late that afternoon. "We'll go skating and coasting, and——"

"Fishing through the ice," added Mr. Jessup. "I've had that in mind for you for some time."

"Say, this trip to Camp Mystery is all right!" cried Frank, with a laugh. "I wonder if we'll have as much fun as this next Winter?"

"More I hope," said Sammy. "But Summer will come before Winter."

And what the chums did the following Summer may be learned by reading the next volume of this series, to be called "Fairview Boys at Lighthouse Cove; Or, Carried Out to Sea." In that we will meet all our young friends again.

In the days that followed Sammy and his chums had many good times. They roved about the island with Mr. Jessup and watched him at his hunting. They had many good meals, too. Mr. Addison left Pine Island, now that he had possession of the spring, and one of the members of the company he had formed took up a residence in the cabin. But there was no further trouble. The mystery had been solved.

"Come on for a skate!" cried Bob, one afternoon. "We only have a few more days here."

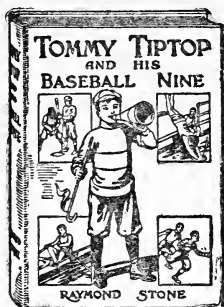
"That's right—and then school once more!" exclaimed Sammy.

And as the Fairview Boys are starting off on the glittering ice, we will take leave of them.

THE END.

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